

THE RAVEN

A NOVEL

BY
GEORGE
HAZELTON






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THE RAVEN



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THE RAVEN

THE LOVE STORY OF
EDGAR ALLAN POE

('Twixt Fact and Fancy)

BY GEORGE HAZELTON

Author of "Mistress Nell," etc.



*"How can so strange and so fine a
genius, and so sad a life, be exprest
and comprest in one line."*

—TENNYSON.

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THE RAVEN

CHAPTER I

The Last Curtain

IT was nearly midnight. An actress lay seriously ill upon her bed in a small damp cellar room beneath a milliner's shop in Richmond town. Her face was very pale and sad and beautiful. There were no foot lamps now to cast illusions, no applause, no triumphs; and yet she was playing the last act of her great life play. The characters were four in number—the mother and three little ones—two boys and a tiny girl. One of the boys had big black eyes. He opened them wide and looked about, then crawled from under the coverlet close to the mother, from which point of vantage he peered up into her face, and she an-

swered with a wan smile. She had not the strength to cover him again or even to chide him. He peeped through the flickering candlelighted gloom, and wondered at the shadows cast upon the wall by the tall posts of the curtainless, comfortless bed. What did it all mean? He pulled himself to the footboard and caught up tenderly a broken doll, which had fallen from his sleeping sister's arms. The baby doll he set up before him, and addressed it in confused sweet syllables of advice, comfort, and love. The eyes of the mother followed his play with rare sorrow written in her face. She had read the whole story of life. She knew its every chapter. She wondered what it had in store for the little fellow with the big eyes. She could only pray for him and the others now. She could only hope and pray.

Her weary hand pushed back the curls from his broad, white temples as he crept back to her side, and she kissed his forehead tenderly.

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She fell back on the pillow exhausted by the effort.

A burst of applause in the near-by playhouse came faintly to the room on the wind that rattled the window. The mother smiled again faintly. Her comrades were playing for her and for the little ones—all for her and for them. There were no jealousies in the theater that night—only love and sympathy in the hearts both of the audience and of the players.

“You will have a prettier doll, Edgar, my boy,” she whispered. “The people of Richmond are very good and kind—and the players are very good and kind—God bless them!”

The play ended. The curtain fell. The receipts were borne by loving hands to the little cellar room.

“Don’t make a noise,” whispered the baby boy with the big eyes, as the good ladies opened the door softly and looked in. “Mamma is asleep.”

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His head was on the pillow close to hers, one arm about her; in the other was the broken doll. The brother and the sister slept on.

The ladies moved softly and quickly to the bedside.

Edgar Poe's mother was indeed asleep—and forever.

CHAPTER II

The Ragged Mountains

THE founders of the University of Virginia chose their site well, for this aristocratic fountain of learning was located in the shadow of the Ragged Mountains, not great peaks these that stencil clear pictures on Heaven's dome, but such as may have been tossed into place by the fancy of the children of the gods, while the gods themselves built Himalayas.

The life of the mountains with their huge sweep, fresh ozone, purple and white peaks, broader vision, has ever influenced the characters of men who dwelt among them, and they cast their lights and shadows upon the soul of Edgar Poe.

He thought them giants, as they chiseled outlines on his soul—the soul of a boy poet, ragged, uncertain and uneven,

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perhaps, but still grandly played upon by breadth of sky and weird rhythm of line, like the meter of a mystic poem. Hat off and fancy free, he ranged these hills as great mountains, for from the crags he climbed so easily, he could look down upon the world beneath—and it ever pleased Edgar Poe intellectually to look down on other men.

Then, too, he had not yet seen nor scaled the greater mountains.

The bright-eyed boy had grown and expanded under the benign influence of the Allan home. He had grown and expanded because the business of John Allan had grown and expanded, and that worthy gentleman had made money, and too much of that money was being expended upon the adopted son. The dark curls and flashing eyes had made him beloved and admired. His boyish pranks had delighted his foster father when he came from his counting-house. The boy's sympathetic nature had found a way into Mrs. Allan's heart, and she

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forgave where she should have chided. Edgar Allan Poe, the son of a poor player, was now the son of a rich planter, and bore his name.

His early education had begun in England, where Mr. Allan had sailed with his wife and his adopted child in order to establish a branch house in London, and Edgar Poe had thus an opportunity to rub elbows with the sons of earls at Brannsbys Manor School at Stoke-Newington, where he was left to study. He had returned to the Virginia home rich in suggestive thought, an athletic boy, fearless, careless, brave, imaginative, a thousand, thousand hopes and fancies and dreams crowding his growing brain. His ideals were unshattered for his new-born fancy still sat unshaken upon its throne. He had met the heirs of England, and none had excelled him in the classroom or outwitted in the field of play.

He was now placed at the University of Virginia. There he was sent to be trained under the influence of the shade

of Thomas Jefferson. No college but the best was worthy of educating the adopted son of John Allan. His room was in the west range, No. 13. It was richly furnished, and was the center of much conviviality and prankish spirits.

Tony Preston, his friend, had entered with him; and Tony had adroitly managed to pass his examinations largely through the help of Poe's papers. Tony's conscience was not stringent. He was bright and joyous and gay. He loved wine more than books; good stories better than great arguments. He furnished Poe with laughter, sincerity, and constancy.

They had been children together; had grown up together; had shared their hopes, their follies, and their revelries together, but Tony was a Tony Lumpkin, indeed, if he was the son of a Virginia Congressman, and Poe loved him for it all. In disregard of the rules of the college they roamed in forbidden hours and places in search of adventures.

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The two young men had been out on one of these mad midnight frolics and had raised the ire of a local constable. Just what they had done he did not know, but the officer of the law was mad, mad all through, and determined to avenge himself. Falling upon Tony and Edgar in the outskirts of the village at a questionable hour of night, he started after them as suspicious characters, but his fat legs and scant breath soon made it easy for them to leave him far behind in the race. He was not sure of his criminal, but his cunning told him that the leader must be Edgar Poe, for who else at the university could be such a madcap?

The poet and Tony fell into their chairs in Poe's room quite out of breath, and brought the bottle from its shelf to alleviate the situation. They knew the constable was after them, and they knew that they had run too fast for him.

"He'll have to go into training to catch us," laughed Tony.

"The incident is closed," retorted

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Poe. Then he proceeded over his glass to tell of his school days in England, where in imagination "William Wilson" had pursued him. Tony was interested in everything that fell from the lips of his boyhood confidant, though Poe had a way of increasing the volume of his stories, and adding fancy where he had begun with fact alone. Tony was well aware of this, and he would never have contented himself to listen to the old stories often told, if he had not learned by experience that with each telling they grew to be more marvelous in proportion. He had never heard of "William Wilson," so he nestled comfortably in his chair and filled his glass and listened.

"I am the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable," said Poe grandiloquently; "and in my earliest infancy I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I advanced in years it has grown more strongly developed; be-

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coming, for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I have grown self-willed, as you know, Tony, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. My parents can do little to check the evil propensities which distinguish me. Some feeble and ill-directed efforts have resulted in complete failure on their part, and, of course, in total triumph on mine. Now my voice is a household law; and at an age when few children have abandoned their leading strings, I am left to the guidance of my own will, and become, in all but name, the master of my own actions."

Tony listened with owl-like wisdom to the noble discriminations of his poet friend, for he did not know what he was about to hear, though he had heard stories of Edgar's school days in England many times. His eyes blinked with importance at being made the confidant of such wisdom by his fellow-student who had been to England, and not forgotten

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by his comrade while he was gone. Tony sipped his wine complacently while Edgar continued his story of his experiences abroad.

“My earliest recollections of school life,” continued Poe, while Tony’s eyes opened with positive admiration, “are connected with a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dreamlike and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight at the deep hollow note of the church bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep.”

Tony yawned and sipped his wine

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again. He was not interested in the church bell or the fretted Gothic steeple.

“The house, I have said, was old and irregular.” Poe sipped his wine, touching Tony’s glass with an effort at manly grandeur, as he proceeded. “The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prisonlike rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week—once every Saturday afternoon, when, attended by two ushers, we were permitted to take brief walks in a body through some of the neighboring fields—and twice during Sunday, when we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village.”

The young poet cast a glance in Tony’s direction, and found that worthy was asleep. He slapped his comrade heartily upon the shoulder and brought him to himself.

"There's more fun in Richmond," said Tony dryly. "Wait until I tell you what I've done while you've been gone. The cards, the wine, and the——"

"And the fair ladies?" laughed Poe. "I admit there are sweeter faces and brighter eyes in Richmond than in old London town. Yet, in fact—in the fact of the world's view—how little there is to remember! The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings, the recitations; the periodical half-holidays, and perambulations; the playground, with its broils, its pastimes, its intrigues——"

"Now, you're talking," laughed Tony, as he sat up with decided interest, sipped more wine, and looked admiringly at his friend who had been away so long.

"How many dukes' sons did you say you had whipped, outswam, outridden, and—taken their money across the table?"

Young Poe laughed, for he knew that Tony knew him, and his youthful spirits

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led him to delight in the chances of life, and the joy that came with the mastery of winning. The love of outgeneraling his antagonist was ever in his blood.

“I do not wish, however, to tell you, Tony,” continued Poe, “of my miserable profligacy here—a profligacy which set at defiance the laws, while it eluded the vigilance of the institution. Some years of folly, passed without profit, had but given me rooted habits of vice, and added, in a somewhat unusual degree, to my bodily stature, when, after a week of soulless dissipation, I invited a small party of the most dissolute students to a secret carousal in my chambers. We met at a late hour of the night; for our debaucheries were to be faithfully protracted until morning. The wine flowed freely, and there were not wanting other and perhaps more dangerous seductions; so that the gray dawn had already faintly appeared in the east while our delirious extravagance was at its height. Madly flushed with cards and intoxication, I

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was in the act of insisting upon a toast of more than wonted profanity, when my attention was suddenly diverted by the violent, although partial, unclosing of the door of the apartment, and by the eager voice of a servant from without. He said that some person, apparently in great haste, demanded to speak with me in the hall.

“Wildly excited with wine, the unexpected interruption rather delighted than surprised me. I staggered forward at once, and a few steps brought me to the vestibule of the building. In this low and small room there hung no lamp; and now no light at all was admitted, save that of the exceedingly feeble dawn which made its way through the semi-circular window. As I put my foot over the threshold, I became aware of the figure of a youth about my own height and habited in a white kerseymere morning frock, cut in the novel fashion of the one I myself wore at the moment. This the faint light enabled me to perceive; but

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the features of his face I could not distinguish. Upon my entering, he strode hurriedly up to me, and, seizing me by the arm with a gesture of petulant impatience, whispered the words 'William Wilson' in my ear.

"I grew perfectly sober in an instant.

"There was that in the manner of the stranger, and in the tremulous shake of his uplifted finger, as he held it between my eyes and the light, which filled me with unqualified amazement; but it was not this which had so violently moved me. It was the pregnancy of solemn admonition in the singular, low, hissing utterance; and, above all, it was the character, the tone, *the key*, of those few, simple, and familiar, yet *whispered* syllables, which came with a thousand thronging memories of bygone days, and struck upon my soul with the shock of a galvanic battery. Ere I could recover the use of my senses he was gone."

"Who in hell was William Wilson?" asked Tony.

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“My double, my shadow, my waking devil! My other self that pursues me,” cried the youth. “A voice that whispered! I detest a man that whispers. It is the voice of the evil one. I’ll tell you some time, Tony, all about it; I’ll tell the world all about it when I am tired playing cards and drinking wine with you and have time to write.”

They both laughed as he ended the story.

Just then a crowd of students rushed into the room and enthusiasm reigned. More wine was found, cards were brought out. The fire crackled in the little grate. Until late hours they played and sang and told stories. Poe was their leader, for he was wilder, more excited, more entertaining than the rest. They called upon him for a story, and he drew from a portfolio a neatly written manuscript and read them a strange, weird tale as the moonlight danced in at the window and the candles and the fire lent their flickering flames to the scene. He

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read a strange, ghostly tale born of grim laughter, love, war, and death. It was so intense and real that the reader's comrades broke out in levity under the intensity of the strain. It was the laughter of hysteria and wine, but the sensitive poet mistook it. He sprang from his seat by the table, tore the manuscript into a hundred pieces, and tossed it into the fire. His friends were unable to stop him. He laughed wildly as the bits of paper caught fire and went up the chimney, the flame seeming to his fancy to form the image of the fair heroine of his story. The love of his first daydream. Then the light faded out into the cold embers of death and the fireplace grew black, as if covered with a pall. *

There was a moment's hush; then the hilarity began again and cards were shuffled. Poe rushed to the table and played wildly. He won and won until stacks of I. O. U.'s and gold lay before him. The faces of his opponents were pale and cold under their losses. Poe

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doubled the stakes, then trebled them, and the break came. All was gone like the tale of his fancy in the smoke from the embers. He owed, and owed heavily, far more heavily than he could pay, but his foster father could. The morning's light came through the window. His comrades departed triumphantly, and the poet was left alone to his reflections.

At the usual hour the classrooms were busy again, and Poe, though sleepless, attended the recitations, as if nothing had happened. He was just conjugating a Greek verb, and Tony was trying to find the answer to the next probable question from his cuff, when the door opened, and to the astonishment of Tony not William Wilson but the constable entered. He looked as if he had been running all night. It was impossible to maintain the decorum of the room, for the class broke out in laughter. This did not increase the good temper of the officer.

"What do you want?" asked the Greek professor with the dignity of Jove.

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“Edgar Poe,” was the stern answer.

There was a moment's hush, then there was a rush of feet across the room, and the young poet jumped from the window to the ground below, taking the sash with him. Nor went he alone. Like so many sheep following the wether his classmates jumped after him. The constable ran to the window, using all the murderous language in his power, but even his oath of office could not induce him to trust his legs and risk a fall.

The boys went to the mountains and spent the afternoon among the cliffs, laughing and buoyant over the constable's chagrin. Poe was their leader, and harangued his troops among the hill-tops like a Greek patriot, assuring them in noble language that a brave retreat was far nobler than defeat.

Despite it all, Poe matriculated, and started for his home in happier spirits by way of Baltimore. He left no shadows behind him except a few gambling debts to entertain his foster father.

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In Baltimore he called at a little cottage covered with flowers. It was where his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, was living, and on the gateway hung a child, dark-eyed, pale of face, and soulful.

“Who are you, my pretty one?” asked Poe. “I could write a poem to your eyes, and I will.”

The child drew back.

“I am Virginia Clemm,” she said.

Before she had time to run away he had taken her in his arms and kissed her.

CHAPTER III

On the Banks of the James

THE James River still flowed quietly by the old town with the same restful spirit that characterized the air, the verdure, the animal life—the inclinations of the inhabitants themselves dwelling upon its grassy banks. It was only where rocks impeded its course that the placid waters grew angry under restraint; it was only under opposition to their will that the rich planters of the neighborhood revealed the fires smoldering within their souls—fires that could endure all things but opposition.

The old Allan mansion house, with its grounds running to the river brink, rested lazily on its foundation, and its massive roof inclined in much the same spirit upon the high, white pillars which supported the wide veranda. Near by, ne-

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groes were singing at their work the melodies of the cotton fields. Here and there cattle chewed their cuds restfully in the shade. Horses splashed knee-deep in the waters below the house. The outhouses and slave quarters leaned obliquely, like so many towers of Pisa, as though to stand erect might indicate an expression of too much effort, unnecessary under such a sun. A rose-covered wall separated the place from one adjoining.

This was now the home of Edgar Allan Poe, the orphaned boy. Into such luxury he had been adopted by John Allan, the rich tobacco planter who owned the estate; in such surroundings of affluence, ease, and princely respect he had grown up, made his youthful friendships, and enthusiastically enjoyed life until the ill-fated days at the University of Virginia, and later at West Point, where he was even less fortunate in his career; and here he had returned from those great institutions of learning, disgraced in the

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eyes of his foster father for youthful follies, lovingly condoned by all others.

Here he rode, drove, laughed and sang, gambled, indeed, after the fashion of the youth of his time, read Byron, and outswam Leander.

Richmond awoke to find a poet born in her midst.

She awoke to find that poet in love, with all the force of his nature, with his cousin Virginia, who—to his eyes a queen—had but recently come from Baltimore with her mother, Mrs. Clemm, to visit in the State that traced its *nomen* to a queen in fact.

There were but two pictures that impressed themselves indelibly upon Poe's heart—one, the face of his mother, whom with baby eyes he had watched fall asleep forever; the other, the face of all faces in the world for him—Virginia.

Morning, afternoon, and evening he haunted the neighbor's cottage where she of the soul-eyes was visiting. Sometimes, indeed, he was seen galloping along the

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country roads alone, but more often his good horse was tied quite prosaically to the fence at Virginia's.

And why not! He was tall and erect, with dark hair, and dark-eyed and graceful. He was a gallant wooer, indeed, in his riding suit. He wore breeches of gray with long boots, spurs, and a waistcoat of lavender and cloth of gold, a stock of single cut in black silk, and a cutaway coat of mulberry broadcloth.

And a rarely beautiful face was the girl's he went to woo. A nature sweet and gentle and sympathetic and strong. There was poetry, too, in her eyes—great poetry. It was the poetry of inspiration! It would never be given to the world by her pen, however. Poe alone saw and read it. It was born to live in his words many, many times, but he could not have written it without her, for she was the other half of it.

From the day of their first meeting, Virginia was to Poe all. She embodied the ideal of his dreams, and her youth

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enhanced the realization of them. He missed no opportunity to see her and be with her and gather from her girlish spirit a sweetness to leaven the greater worldliness which had been his lot.

The tie of kinship, too, made it but natural that Virginia should be welcome at the Allan mansion and that Poe should seek her at her cottage home. Her charm had won Mrs. Allan, and even stern John Allan had been known to smile at her ingenuous remarks.

One evening the young people were affectionately chatting in the moonlight upon the cottage veranda, and catching furtive glimpses through the trees of the glimmering waters of the James River below and of the clouds and stars above.

"Of what are you thinking, Edgar?" asked Virginia sweetly.

"I was wondering how I could put those floating clouds into words," he replied dreamily.

"See my face in them," she laughed with sweet conceit.

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"Your face is in all, dear one," he replied, his arm about her, his cheek close to hers. "You are the soul of the universe for me. You are my inspiration, my delight. You are my love."

"Your words are so beautiful, Edgar," she said.

"But I meant them for you, and will tell it to all the world, my love."

"Not to-night, please, Edgar," she pleaded with her woman's longing fear, as her love nestled back into its soul nest.

He kissed her. She fluttered like a wounded bird. He healed the wound with a second kiss. The moon approved. The stars blessed them.

Thus they sat and talked and whispered love until Roscoe Pelham, Mr. Allan's learned young secretary, entered the gate. The newcomer was one of those men, unlovable by nature, who ever looked askance with the critic's eye on a scene of pleasantry of which his jealous heart never permitted him to be a party.

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He, too, had come to see the fair Virginia. He, too, loved her, in his way. She arose and greeted him cordially, not altogether displeased with the look of annoyance which she caught in her lover's eyes at the approach of the other.

The three sat and talked—and waited—and talked again.

Poe patiently hoped for Pelham to depart. Pelham impatiently waited for Poe to depart.

Thus the evening wore on, or rather dragged on, until Virginia was forced, to her consternation, to do the entire talking. The situation grew strained, for her fund of entertainment was finally exhausted. She had reached her wit's end, when the sound of angry words arose on the turnpike a short distance from the house.

"What can it be?" she cried, glad of any diversion that might relieve an awkward lapse in the conversation, during which each young man, without regard to his hostess's comfort, had apparently

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occupied himself with his own uncomplimentary thoughts of the other.

The three started in the direction of the road on a tour of investigation. The sounds had grown louder, and were now mingled with shrieks of suffering. A roughly dressed and more roughly mannered man was discovered beating a negro severely with a whip. The poor slave was writhing with pain. Such scenes were rare in the neighborhood, for the slaves thereabouts were usually treated well.

Virginia shuddered at the sight and placed her hands over her ears to keep out the cries of the sufferer.

Pelham leaned on the fence, preparatory to enjoying the sport; for, as he thought, "there ought to be more of them whipped."

Poe endured the brutal scene as long as his sensitive nature could do so, then broke forth into protest.

The owner of the slave naturally became indignant.

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"I will have no interference, sir!" he snarled in a drunken voice from the middle of the road.

"But it is so cruel," pleaded Virginia, unable to control her feelings longer.

"Whose nigger is it?" demanded the owner, with a leer and a biting crack of his whip.

"Mine, if you'll sell him," cried Poe sympathetically. He could not bear human suffering any more than he could bear to see Virginia in distress at the sight of the misfortune before her.

"I'll sell anything I own," growled the man, "if I get my price."

"How much?" asked Poe quickly.

"Six hundred," replied the owner; "and I'll throw in the whip. You'll need it."

He laughed discordantly and did not seem disturbed by the fact that he laughed alone. The disgust on Poe's face at the drunken declaration was manifest even in the moonlight.

"You can't do it; your allowance is

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greatly overdrawn," whispered Pelham grimly.

"But the governor's isn't," answered Poe.

Virginia thought she caught a far-reaching malice in Pelham's tone and a flash in Poe's eye as he answered. A great fear for her poet came into her heart, and she felt that she had been the cause of it all. Whither would it lead?

Poe drew a piece of paper from his pocket, and placing it on a rail of the fence, wrote with some difficulty an order on his foster father for \$600 and handed it to the man.

"Will that do?" he asked.

The owner was too much under the influence of drink and bad temper to take note of the contempt quite manifest in Poe's voice. After much incomprehensible mumbling and awkward fumbling, he produced a *locofoco* from the depths of his rough coat and, striking it on his boot, made out to read the order.

"I reckon that will do," he said, with

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a grin; for he now recognized in the youthful purchaser the adopted son of John Allan. He pushed the negro brutally in the direction of his new master, swayed a little in his tracks, and added: "You better take the whip."

"No, you need it more," retorted Poe severely.

His reflection was lost, however, so far as any effect upon the sensibilities of the slave driver was concerned.

Without further formality, the little party, including the negro, returned to the house. Virginia ran to her room for a bottle of ointment, which she gave to the black man to soothe his wounds; and then he was sent on his way to take up his abode in the slave quarters on the Allan place.

The evening was beginning to wane.

Poe and Pelham started simultaneously for home.

During the walk, each must have been absorbed with his own thoughts, for no word was passed, agreeable or otherwise.

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It was not until they had lighted their candles in the great front hall, preparatory to retiring for the night, that the secretary broke the silence.

"Good night, Mr. Poe," he said solemnly.

"Good night, Mr. Pelham," was the quiet reply.

A few moments later the big front door opened again softly, and Poe emerged from the house—alone. He quickly retraced his steps, with a lover's eagerness, along the way he had just returned.

The moonlight shone bright upon Virginia's cottage as he approached. All was silent. No sign of life! His heart almost stopped in disappointment.

A merry ripple of soft laughter came from an angle made of honeysuckle on the veranda.

An instant more and he was telling Virginia his love with all the ardor of a poet, and she was answering with all her trembling heart.

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"Your loveliness is that of a seraph," breathed Poe.

"I did not expect you," she answered coyly.

"Then why were you waiting?" he asked. Virginia stammered:

"Why — I was waiting — for a man——"

"And the man obeyed your thought," he cried.

She nestled into his arms—for were not his arms in waiting? The blushing honeysuckle hid them.

"And will he always do so?" asked Virginia earnestly.

"As long as the moon floods the night with love light, he'll be at your window," was the lover's fervent answer.

"But when the night is dark?" she asked with girlish fearfulness.

"Then he'll follow your soul light," answered Poe. A kiss sealed the compact.

"Oh, Edgar, I fear so, lest evil may come to you through me," she cried.

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"Believe in good, and evil cannot come," was the loving answer. Virginia still was fearful.

"You are rich and brilliant, I am poor and nothing. You will forget me."

"Not till the world grows old and our souls as one sit upon a new-born star and call the crust world graybeard!"

"You have other loves," sighed Virginia.

"No—no—" He hesitated. His sensitive heart divined a fateful meaning. "You mean—wine—horses—cards!" he cried.

She drew back, hurt lest her introspective fear had been divined by him she loved.

"I have health and youth," he said. "I must live to know. I must sink to rise. I must suffer to grow great."

She heard his words, but they meant little to her child self. Her heart was so full of love that she did not understand it all. Yet she felt she had said too much.

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“Dearest one!” she cried. “I did not mean——”

Poe soothed her suffering heart with tender sympathy. He was older and he saw things which she did not see. The burden was for him, and he was willing to bear it.

“You mean another love? I offer up a vow to-night that I shall never bring myself to love any daughter of the earth but you. We’ll live in the Valley of the Many Colored Grass and wander together by the River of Silence. I shall never knowingly do aught to bring you unhappiness,” he went on. “That I pledge you; but I must tell you to-night, Virginia, something that I have never spoken before—even to myself. I am the plaything of some awful, inward force that drives me on like the flotsam and jetsam of the sea.”

She sobbed and her head nestled on his breast.

A whip-poor-will broke the silence of the night with its plaintive love notes.

The Raven

"Can you not control your fate?" she asked. "You are so brave and strong and wonderful."

"Some men can make their destiny, my love," he answered, "but I was not so born. In the day I see the darkness coming. In the night strange hands lead me. Do not shudder. I must speak of it just this once. I seem to feel the devil and all the misery that he reeks. His emblem follows me. It is small and black. I know not what—a shadow, perhaps! Virginia!" He caught her to him fondly. "I am not mad," he went on. "No, it's a play—all a play! Why, every seventh Friday I do some mad act, and the last is to tell Virginia of my love."

He laughed with sudden, wildly happy thoughts. The stillness of the night crept upon them. They both shuddered. Then he thought of her alone, and whispered comfort.

"Your last mad act was to cross Pelham," she answered fearfully.

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"I fear no man," cried Poe. "You are life to me, and wherever the winds and waves of Fate may toss my soul, its last love cry will be—Virginia!"

"But, sweetheart," he continued, "my latest crime—yes, a crime indeed, for which I may meet death deservedly—was to write verses to my love."

They both laughed and kissed.

"I am sure they are wondrous verses, if you wrote them, Edgar." There dwelt the admiration of human worship in her soft voice. "Let me read them."

Poe took a scroll from his heart pocket, ribbon-tied. Then he drew it back teasingly.

"No—I kiss my critic first, then she may read with proper prejudice."

Virginia paid for the scroll and it was given to her with grateful hands.

"Good night."

He kissed her passionately and was gone.

She read the verses by the light of the moon; but, while her heart beat high

The Raven

with their love refrain, she shuddered
with the thought of the small black
shadow which haunted the path of her
beautiful boy lover:

“ We grew in age—and love—together—
 Roaming the forest, and the wild ;
My breast her shield in wintry weather—
 And, when the friendly sunshine smil’d,
And she would mark the opening skies,
I saw no Heaven—but in her eyes.

“ Young love’s first lesson is—the heart :
 For ’mid that sunshine, and those smiles,
When, from our little cares apart,
 And laughing at her girlish wiles,
I’d throw me on her throbbing breast,
 And pour my spirit out in tears—
There was no need to speak the rest—
 No need to quiet any fears
Of her—who ask’d no reason why,
But turned on me her quiet eye ! ”

CHAPTER IV

Everyone on the Place Loves Him

IT was the afternoon of a Southern day, and John Allan was sitting beneath the shade of a great magnolia upon his lawn, oblivious to all but his own reflections, and near him, in a rustic rocker, sat Mrs. Allan, who glanced up occasionally to make sure that her lord and master had his every wish. A service of tea, brought from one of the outhouses by a dear black "mammy," clad in spotless apron and bright bandanna turban, rested upon the rustic table before them.

The old planter was a picture of the Southern gentleman of the old school. Knee breeches and buckles revealed no "shrunk shank," but the firm, strong leg of a once vigorous youth. A blue coat with gold buttons, a buff waistcoat, a large silver-topped cane, and a hat

The Raven

framed after the days of Washington, whom he could well remember, lent a picturesqueness to his person. His face was proud, his bearing stately. Few, indeed, enjoyed a more substantial influence in the community where he lived—an absolute king in his own home and over his slaves.

Yet common report credited John Allan with being a kind man, a good man; and he was a good man when he was right; but, like other men, he was not always right. He saw life only from the standpoint of self, though he would have been the last in the world to have admitted it. Indeed, he had been exalted so long by all in his service and so petted and pampered by his family that, like Southern men in general, he had grown quite oblivious to the fact that his help-mate of years was in the habit of anticipating his every thought without regard to the number of steps it cost her.

It was apparent that the lord of the manor and his sweet, old-fashioned wife

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had been deep in discussion of some family matter. It was equally apparent that they had not wholly agreed. To be sure, there was no open evidence of feud, for Mrs. Allan was always sweetly submissive; but it was noticeable from the manner in which old John bit his lip and twisted himself occasionally in his chair that he was thinking, and thinking hard. At last the bubble reached the surface.

"I tell you, my dear," he declared with the dignity of Southern gallantry, mollified, of course, by the fact that his opponent was the wife of his bosom, "it is your fault. Now, that ends it, once and for all."

He straightened himself impressively, snapped his snuffbox with a grand manner, and restored it forcefully to his pocket. Who on the place dared oppose his opinion?

"Just as you say, John," she suggested meekly. "I have had all the faults of the family for many years—since our honeymoon days, indeed—but I am still

The Raven

the 'better half,' you know. Have another dish of tea, John?"

If she had only answered back sharply, just this once, he would have been content; but how could he quarrel with such a woman? It was irritating beyond endurance, and his irritation was evinced by a sharp declination of more tea, followed by a muttering:

"The fault was in adopting the boy at first. It was bad stock, bad stock; and you should have known it, my dear."

He got up, struck the sod with his cane, crossed his arms behind him, and paced up and down the lawn before Mrs. Allan. The subject of his displeasure was now fairly put; it was launched in the family circle of two.

Mrs. Allan looked up at her husband complacently, and moved quietly out of harm's way his cup of tea, which she had hastened to take at the first sign of his displeasure.

"John," she quietly remonstrated, "you know you have said a thousand

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times that the Poes came of the best blood in the land."

For a moment he was nonplussed. This remark could, of course, not be construed as direct opposition to his will, but it surely had the ring of a difference. He turned sharply upon his wife, drew himself to his full height, adjusted his wig, which never sat easy when he was annoyed, and began an oration in reply. After the fashion of Virginia statesmen of his time, he must utter his simplest sentences, when roused, with a touch of the grandiloquence of Patrick Henry, whom he emulated.

"I said the boy's grandfather was a good man, my dear; General Poe was a patriot, a patriot, a friend of Washington. General Lafayette visited his grave before he left the country, knelt and kissed the sod, exclaiming, with tears in his eyes: 'Here lies a noble heart.' I said the Poes came of the best blood—way back, my dear, way back."

Mrs. Allan placed her tea on the table

The Raven

by her husband's cup and mildly intimated, unfortunately for her a little above the click of the colliding china, so that it reached his ears:

"Two generations, John."

"Well, two generations is—two generations!" he snapped forth in response; for his wit failing to supply him with a more convincing answer, like Dr. Johnson, when his pistol missed fire, he proceeded forthwith to knock down his adversary with the butt end of it.

Mrs. Allan's power of argument for the moment was exhausted. Her womanly instinct, however, was not. She placed her hands lovingly on her husband's shoulders, and looked fondly into his eyes. When she considered him sufficiently pacified to listen, she led him gently back in memory to the days of 1811, when she was twenty-five and he was thirty-one. She recalled again how a beautiful actress, struggling nobly in her art to keep the wolf from the door and from her little ones, was then in Rich-

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mond playing plays—the gay, when her heart was breaking; plays—the sad, when her life was ebbing. She recalled to his mind the sympathetic notice in the *Enquirer* of that day, which still clung like wax to her memory, wherein the sweet player's friends had appealed to the kind ladies of Richmond for aid on the evening of a mother's last benefit:

“To the Humane.

“On this night Mrs. Poe, lingering on the bed of disease and surrounded by her children, asks your assistance; and *asks it perhaps for the last time.*”

She recalled the “eighth” day of that cold December, for, as in most old heads, there were a few days of joy and a few days of sorrow, about which the events of her life's calendar revolved.

“You have not forgotten that day, John,” she whispered softly. “I am sure of it. I had taken you to the poor dead mother's room. How forlorn, how desolate it was!”

The Raven

The planter's head fell a little lower on his breast and his lip twitched nervously.

She reminded him how the mother had died, a stranger in a strange land; how one little boy had gone to friends in Baltimore; how Rosalie had touched Mrs. McKensie's heart; and how another child, the prettier boy, was still clinging to his mother's arms, which could no longer feel his pressure. "You and I," she continued softly, "stood there alone with him by the coffin. You stooped and wiped the tears from the little fellow's eyes. You remember how the raven curls tossed wildly upon his temples as he said: 'Mamma is asleep; don't wake her!' God had given us no children of our own, John. Well, you brought the baby here; you gave him a home and your name."

John Allan's face was a study as the last words dropped softly from the lips of his companion of many years. The old tobacco king loved his wife in his

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way, and he loved his adopted boy. He was not to allow himself, however, to be moved from the position he had taken. He had always been severe in his judgment of himself. It was his duty to maintain the same rigid rule with others, for temperament, that will-o'-the-wisp of the soul, played no part in his understanding of the acts of other men.

"I don't remember any such thing," he finally made up his mind to reply, with visible irritation. "You are growing old. You forget, my dear, you forget. I have noticed it for some time. You are losing your faculties, I fear."

"You are losing your heart, John."

The reproof in her words was so gentle that the old planter hesitated; but his purpose was rigid as adamant. He knew he could not be wrong.

"I am losing my patience. He gambles away my money like a song and then comes back with his roguish eye and blandly calls for more."

The Raven

“And you give it to him, John.”

“That’s it; lay it all at my door. Just like a woman. By Jove, you have ruined the boy, positively ruined him. I’ll make a man of him, or kill him. That’s the only way to raise boys. He must not be coddled; he must obey.”

“Then you should have begun that way years ago, John.”

Mrs. Allan had long ago learned to love her boy deeply, and he could have committed few indiscretions that would have driven him from her heart.

John Allan, with the business instinct of a man who is in the wrong, hastened to put his wife equally on the defensive by questioning the wisdom of her own way with her son.

“And you have encouraged his infatuation for his cousin Virginia against my pronounced wishes, my dear. It must be stopped.”

This Mrs. Allan could not endure, for the sake of the love she bore two young hearts.

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"His love we cannot control, John," she pleaded. "That is in the province of God, not man."

"Love!" almost shrieked the old planter in reply. "I will not hear such bosh."

"Virginia is a beautiful girl and worthy of a prince," the motherly heart still dared bravely to contend.

The old gentleman tried to screen his passion-flushed face. He feared that he had gone too far; for he realized that he was fast losing his temper, and with it perhaps his advantage.

"Tush!" he explained, with an effort still to convince his wife that she must necessarily be wrong—since she differed from him. "I know the girl for Edgar. An alliance, my dear, an alliance; no love nonsense. Unite two fortunes to assist the boy's brains, and he will own the State, become a great leader, a politician of some use to his country. I never believed much in love!"

Mrs. Allan raised her eyes shyly.

The Raven

"You told me once you did, John, quite vehemently."

The planter was caught. On other occasions he would have laughed and replied with a kiss. This matter, however, was too serious with him. He had brooded over it for days, and could not now condescend to treat it flippantly. Therefore, he replied impatiently by way of half excuse for a speech which his temper had trapped him into uttering without due forethought:

"Times have changed, my dear. I had the faults of a boy then."

"You have the faults of a man now," replied Mrs. Allan, very firmly for her; after which there followed quite naturally a pause in the conversation until she added wistfully: "I prefer those of the boy."

Her husband winced. He could not admit, however, that his logic was not sound, though he began to fear that perhaps he had not expressed himself quite in the way to carry conviction to the

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feminine mind. What right had Edgar to disobey his counting-house rules? What right had Mrs. Allan at this late period of their matrimonial career to differ from her husband, whom so long ago she had promised to love, honor, and obey? No one else dared. The point troubled him.

Mrs. Allan walked slowly to the bench where her husband now sat in restless perturbation. Leaning over him, she began hesitatingly:

“Edgar loves Virginia. Love is the strongest fiber in his being. You cannot eradicate it.”

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed excitedly; for he was always piqued at any direct suggestion that there was aught that he could not accomplish. “I adopted him, he’s my boy, he’s all wrong; and I will correct him or have done with him. There’s an end of it!”

Another pause ensued while the wind rustled the leaves above. Mrs. Allan sat and rocked; John Allan sat and

thought. The voices of the negroes returning from the fields arose in melodies sweet and low upon the air. They passed quite near their master and mistress on the way to their quarters.

One, bolder than the rest, cried out gayly as he caught sight of them: "Good night, Marsa! Good night, Missus!"

Mrs. Allan smiled sweetly in response. John Allan made no reply to the faithful salutation.

"Where's Mars' Edgah?" inquired one old negro with a hoe upon his shoulder.

The reference to the young master quickly brought forth a chorus of inquiries and good will. "Say good night to Mars' Edgah!" "*A* good night for Mars' Edgah!"

Indeed, the voices continued in expressions of love for the young master until the field tools were in place and the slaves in their quarters to await the evening meal.

Mrs. Allan rose triumphantly.

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"See, John, everyone on the place loves him. They would not change 'Mars' Edgah!' "

Naturally provoked that this sign of servile affection should be invoked as a reflection on the position he had taken, the planter retorted hotly:

"He is not half as dear to them as he is to me. They do not have to pay his bills!"

The speaker picked up his hat and started for the gate with a quick energetic movement.

"Are you going far, my dear?" asked the solicitous wife.

"I am going down the street; I want room to think."

Mrs. Allan ran to the gate and, leaning over it, spoke with the eloquence of emotion.

"Then think of this, John," she said tearfully; "the old grandfather of our boy whom you spoke so highly of but now had worldly notions like you, John. Yet, you remember, his boy turned his

back on home to follow the fortunes of the girl he loved. He threw away a career, the prestige of his name, his home, his friends; he became a strolling player to be at that sweetheart's side, and he was true to that love till death separated them. Have a care, John. That boy was Edgar's father."

She turned and entered the house.

The old gentleman hesitated.

"Sentimental bosh!" he muttered. "I've given him one more chance to straighten up; and it shall be the last."

He started again, hesitated, returned and, going to the steps, called in an uncertain voice: "Mrs. Allan! Mrs. Allan!" There was no response. For a moment he stood gazing into the doorway of the big hall, where she had disappeared, as in a quandary, trying possibly to satisfy himself with the conviction that his wife never could understand men. He finally returned, however, to the gate, closed it not too gently behind him, and disappeared down the path.

CHAPTER V

He Is Only Sowing His Wild Oats, Sir

AFFAIRS drifted for some days with no further eruptions from the family volcano. Mrs. Allan, by her womanly tact, avoided any open scene. Edgar Poe, the handsome young heir prospective, came and went as usual. He noticed that his foster father was in one of his periodic moods of depression, but gave the matter little thought, attributing it to the worries of the planter's large business. His real thoughts were elsewhere. So were the thoughts of Roscoe Pelham—elsewhere.

As it happened, Erebus—for so his new master called his first and last slave—was the only one on the place this particular afternoon who seemed animated with any desire that called forth visible activity. This was indeed unusual to

him except when the orders emanated from "Mars' Edgah," whom he could not move too quickly to serve. Mrs. Allan had cleverly refrained from mentioning the new acquisition to her lord and master for obvious reasons. The newcomer was the subject of much speculation, too, among the slaves: "What fo' did de young Marsa want wid dat stupid nigger?"

For the twentieth time during the day Erebus had managed to approach the gate for a peep down the road.

For some unaccountable reason, too, his black head for hours before had seemed perturbed, especially when Mrs. Allan had called him to the mansion to attend to certain little household labors. What was the matter with the negro? Was he bewitched? He was constantly neglecting his work, to his mistress's great annoyance, and glancing out of the window. Then, too, on his way to and from the slave quarters, he had seen fit each time to take a circuitous route, man-

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aging to get close enough to the gate to have a look far down the turnpike; then he would mysteriously make again for the stables, and inspect an empty stall, as if by some magic its young master's horse might have been spirited into its place without his personal knowledge.

It was at this juncture that Pelham had ended a fruitless errand, and was in a dejected mood—to say the least—one not to be trifled with, especially by a slave.

The young secretary was returning from Virginia's house much annoyed that he had not found her home. He had caught a glimpse of a white dress through a tree vista opening upon a pretty path by the river front. Was it Virginia? Was she alone? Increasing his stride, in anything but a happy humor, he was hastening to the Allan mansion house to find a spot in which to brood over his misfortune.

Pelham's personality was one that women did not and could not like; but, instead of recognizing the fact, he blind-

ly pursued them with greater persistence, till they exhausted their wits in framing excuses to avoid him. He was especially angered to see how easily the young master of the house became the idol of the fair, old and young, in Richmond. He could not bear to see others possess what he did not.

Virginia, it is true, had always appeared gracious whenever Mr. Pelham had called and found her at home; but since the incident of the purchase of the slave he had not found her in so often. He suspected many things, but he was quite unable to satisfy his suspicions.

As he entered the lawn, in such a spirit of unrest, he met Erebus at the gate. The secretary was ordinarily above noticing the menials on the place, except to call one or another as he wished some personal service performed. Poe's slave, for some reason, however, on this particular occasion, attracted his attention.

"Whose nigger are you?" he asked surlily.

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"Mars' Edgah's, sah."

"Oh, Master Edgar's, are you?" Pelham looked up and recognized not without further irritation Poe's late purchase.

"Yes, sah, he don' bought me, sah."

"Oh, he done bought you, did he?"

"Yes, sah, Mars' Johnson was murderin' me wid de black snake, sah, an' de good Lord sen' Mars' Edgah t' sabe me, sah. Mars' Edgah don' bought me fo' \$600, sah."

Pelham's lips curled sarcastically; for the conditions of the incident were well rooted in his memory.

"Generous, wasn't he, with the governor's money?" he muttered and threw himself discontentedly into a chair beneath the trees.

"'Deed he was, sah," proudly responded the negro, who was gradually regaining his courage, which had momentarily been shaken by the brusqueness of the questioner.

Pelham, lost in his own unhappy reflections, proceeded forthwith to forget

the presence of the slave. Suddenly, however, he started, and looked about, and there still stood the negro, "awaitin' orders." The secretary was on the point of sending him on his way, with an impatient nod, when, thinking better of it, he motioned him closer. The negro obeyed, but somewhat reluctantly.

"What is your name?" Pelham asked in a tone quite conciliatory for him.

"My real name?"

"Your real name."

"Dunno, sah."

"Who was your father?" persisted the secretary, still in a patronizing manner, though visibly annoyed by the apparent stupidity of the slave.

The poor negro was dumfounded at this startling inquiry into his paternity.

"Fo' de Lord, Marsa, I done forget de gemmon's name."

Pelham smiled one of his ungracious smiles—indeed he was never known to laugh—as he recognized the probable truthfulness of the reply.

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The black man seemed to think that the *onus* was still on him, and continued with a stammer to explain:

"Mars' Johnson call me dat d— nigger, sah, but Mars' Edgah, he call me Erebus, sah."

"So Mr. Edgar calls you Erebus, Prince of Darkness, does he?"

The secretary straightened up a trifle, glorying in the fact that, at least, the young master could not make classical allusions which were beyond his understanding.

"Yes, sah," added Erebus proudly, "an' he call me his 'valley,' sah."

"He needs a troop of valets to look after him," muttered Pelham. "Well, Erebus," he said, as he ran through his employer's letters irritably, "you may get me a glass of milk."

The negro's eyes rolled contemptuously. "Mars' Edgah neber ask fo' no milk." The servant obeyed, however, and went his way.

The young secretary twisted himself in

his chair impatiently. Would *he* ever be possessed of a valet? It was he who deserved one; for he had labored, he had read, he was a profound scholar, a student of politics and law, and he would not long be servant to any man.

If one might have looked into Pelham's mind at that moment, he no doubt would have found a medley of irritating thoughts which, producing discord, worked to defeat the secretary's own ends. If the crimson-streaked aura about him could have been translated, it probably would have reflected envious words.

He felt that Virginia had had an engagement and evaded him. Why could she not have seen him this afternoon? It must have been she and the handsome young spendthrift whom he had seen by the river front. A romantic popinjay, who wrote bad verses—a Byronic genius, bah! Her veranda had been so pretty on this particular afternoon—such a love nest, and he had thought out so much to say to her. “We’ll wait,” he muttered

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to himself; "the fool will hang himself in time—just a little time. The governor has stood it a good while; but it will end, and then Miss Virginia may sit in the moonlight with the beggar until——"

Erebus did not like the look which came over Mars' Pelham's face as he returned with a glass of milk. He, therefore, edged away aimlessly, but was quickly brought to his senses, for the secretary had turned sharply upon him.

"What makes you look so black?" Pelham demanded, when he fully realized the return of the slave and the fulfillment of his order.

"I reckon de good Lord, Mars' Pelham."

The frightened negro again made a hopeless effort to see down the turnpike. Pelham noticed it.

"Come here; what is the matter? Do you hear?" he demanded irritably.

"I'se powerful feared fo' Mars' Edgah," the faithful negro at last reluctantly admitted.

The Raven

"He needs your solicitude and prayers," sneered the secretary.

"Somethin' turrible's gwine t' happen," continued the slave. "When I went fo' de milk, I stub my toe free times; an' when I'se gwine t' milk ol' Brindle, Mars' Edgah's cow, dis mornin', she don' dried up."

"That's most prophetic. Where is your young master?"

"Dunno, sah," replied Erebus, anxiously glancing over his shoulder again. "He don' ride 'way wid Mars' Tony Preston las' night an' I neber put eyes on him sence."

The young secretary tried to reconcile this bit of information with the glimpse he thought he had had of the young master and Virginia.

John Allan at this particular moment was returning from the town. He was returning by instinct rather than by forethought; for he was in one of those unhappy moods that did not permit him to reflect upon the direction of his step. He

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only nervously went ahead, and habit led him safely to his own hearthstone.

Pelham caught a glimpse of his employer before he reached the gate and, breaking off his questioning of Erebus abruptly, left the negro in sleepy wonderment. The secretary hastened to a work table in a shady spot on the veranda and began apparently to labor upon his employer's correspondence and ledgers.

The planter crossed the lawn on his way to the house with an impatient, irritable step. Observing his secretary hard at his duties, as he supposed, he approached him, and without a word tossed a handful of letters which he had brought with him upon the table. He was about to enter the house, when he observed that Pelham had the ledger open at the accounts of "E. A. P." The planter was on fire in an instant.

"That boy will drive me to the poor-house," he muttered loud enough for Pelham to realize the trend of his thoughts.

The secretary turned the ledger to another page, with a hypocritical lifting of his eyes, as if he desired to shield the young master.

"Turn back," demanded his employer impatiently. "You will find more to enter here," pointing to an order for \$600, which he had thrown upon the table with the letters. It was evident that the former owner of Erebus had finally sobered up and thought it best to present his order at the Allan counting-house.

"Bills, bills, bills; nothing but bills! Wine, horses, and cards from morning till night! By Jove, I won't stand it any longer. My mind is set. He shall go, bag and baggage."

"Has anything gone wrong, sir? Can't I—" asked the secretary in a soothing voice of surprised innocence, while his eye glowed with malicious delight that the day of judgment seemed near.

"Gone wrong, gone wrong?" exclaimed Mr. Allan excitedly. "Look at my ledger. I will be a bankrupt, sir, if

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that boy keeps on. Here is an order for \$600 more for some extravagance, sir."

"He only purchased a slave," explained Pelham suavely, dropping his eyes, together with the irritating remark.

"A worthless one, then," cried the planter. "He's no judge of niggers."

"He will come around all right, Mr. Allan. He is only sowing his wild oats, sir."

"Wild oats, sir. I reckon he has sowed a good many acres since I was fool enough to give him a home."

"But he is so brilliant, so handsome, and such an honor to the family, sir, if I may be allowed," suggested the secretary blandly.

The old gentleman leaned for a moment speechless against one of the pillars that supported the veranda and looked way down the river.

"He was such a promising fellow when I adopted him," he finally said thoughtfully, not without much effort at control. "I loved him, sir, I loved him,

and do still. But there is an end to everything. At the university he disgraced himself and me by his mad conduct. I forgave him—to please my wife.”

It seemed as if he almost, unconsciously, took cynical pleasure in placing the burden of acting against his own better judgment, as he thought, upon his better half. Pelham sat silent, listening with marked respect. John Allan wiped his spectacles.

“Dismissed from West Point,” he continued in self-appreciation, “I took him to my heart and home again. I have paid his debts, and paid his debts, and here it is again, sir; and, you see, sir—you see—there is my mail, Pelham. You will please attend to it, sir. That boy will drive me to the grave.”

The planter disappeared into the house in anything but a happy spirit. He was in no mood to recall the old adage that there are two sides to every question, and that the defendant, too, of right should have his day in court.

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A smile played upon the secretary's face as his eyes followed the parting figure of his employer. He was clever enough to know that nothing makes a man surer that he is right than to cross him gently. Perhaps he gloated just a little, too, in the thought that Virginia might yet prefer a poor secretary with some expectations to a young master with none.

Be that as it may, he opened the ledger with a pleased smile and charged \$600 to "E. A. P."

CHAPTER VI

Enchantress, We Welcome Thee

PELHAM closed the ledger triumphantly. The item had been carefully entered; and now, filled with his own affairs, he slipped back to the lawn to find Erebus, who, as he expected, was not far from where he had left him. Indeed, he found that worthy now sound asleep under a tree by the gate opening upon the turnpike. He proceeded to rouse the negro roughly, after he had glanced about to make sure that no one was within hearing.

"So you are worried about Mr. Edgar, are you?" he asked.

Erebus rubbed his eyes stupidly. The secretary dropped a bright new silver *levy* into his black hand. The negro's eyes became like saucers. In an instant

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and for the moment he was all smiles and gratitude.

Pelham permitted him to digest his lately acquired wealth, then he suggested, with a casual air:

"Your young master spends a good part of his idleness at his fair cousin's eh?"

The negro was on the alert again. He had received instructions from "Mars' Edgah" on that point shortly after his acquisition.

"Dunno, sah," he mumbled stubbornly.

Pelham, seeing that he was not to be rewarded freely with the desired information, became impatient.

"Stupid!" he exclaimed, to the greater anxiety of the slave. "He sends you with messages and flowers, eh? Come, what have you seen? Out with it, and not a word, on your life, about my asking."

The faithful black man dropped his eyes and drew away.

"Nothin', sah, nothin'."

"Black liar!" cried Pelham, in a rage at being frustrated in his desires by a slave. "Tell me, or I'll break every bone in your infernal body!"

With a quick movement he raised his cane threateningly. Erebus fell on his knees.

"Don' strike me, Mars' Pelham, don' strike me, sah!"

"Then answer me!" demanded the secretary fiercely.

"Fo' Gaud, I don' know, Mars' Pelham. Don' strike, sah!"

The cane descended with such force across the crouching negro's back that it was shattered in many pieces.

Almost at the instant arose the sound of swiftly galloping horses. Edgar Poe, after his erratic fashion, had taken the neighboring fences and stone wall with a dash and had landed upon his foster father's lawn. Thus he announced his return home cross-country with his friend, Tony Preston.

"Here, enough of that!" he cried, as

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he jumped from the saddle within a few feet of Pelham before the secretary could recover his surprise. Poe had not heard the words, but he had seen the blow.

"Fair play, Pelham, fair play!" commanded the young master.

"Here, make a ring, Tony. *General* Pelham and *Judge* Erebus are about to fight it out!"

To the secretary, Poe's words were far more effective than a blow, but he controlled his fury with a huge effort. He did not undervalue the biting implication of equality in the remark, however, as he turned surlily on his heel and started toward the veranda.

"Wait, good friends!" interrupted the ever-happy Tony, who had closely followed Poe on another horse. "I call time until Erebus brings the referees a little something to tone up the judgment!" He smacked his lips longingly and jumped from the saddle.

"Good!" cried Poe, much to Pel-

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ham's disgust, but greatly to the satisfaction of his friend. "Quick, Erebus, to the cellar with you and bring us some of the governor's best! We have had a hard gallop. Quick, boy! Some of the choicest!"

"Yes, Mars' Edgah! I'se got it wait-in' fo' yo'."

With a spirit that would have astonished Mrs. Allan, Erebus darted away on his master's "errant of mercy," as Tony aptly characterized such missions.

Stable boys quickly took the horses in charge. Poe's chestnut was led to his stall after being scraped and well rubbed down. The reins of Tony's fine mount were tossed over a limb of a tree, just outside the lawn, to wait impatiently the pleasure of his wayward master. The good horse had waited many times and many hours before for Preston.

"Look at Pelham!" cried the jolly Tony, so different from young Poe—and no doubt for such reason his boon comrade—as he glanced reproachfully tow-

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ard the veranda. "He is drinking milk, and on such a day! A man who will drink milk is lost, irrevocably lost."

"Tony, don't be critical," observed Poe, in gentle reproof; "Mr. Pelham has a conscience."

"In this world, Mr. Poe," retorted the secretary sourly, "a man's capability is not judged by the liquor he drinks."

"But his capacity is, Pelham," retorted Poe good-humoredly, for he was quicker to forget and forgive than his father's secretary.

"Each man to his taste. For myself, I can't drink milk, my digestion won't permit it," laughed Tony.

"And I can't drink water on account of my iron constitution," laughed Poe.

In a few minutes Erebus returned with a big tray dangerously poised on high, upon which were glasses, ice, and a long-necked favorite bottle. There was a cry of anxious welcome from Tony as he appeared with his precious burden.

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"Come, Tony," exclaimed the young host, "we'll lower these spirits to raise our own."

He caught a glimpse of Erebus's face as the slave lowered the tray adroitly and also safely to the garden table.

"You look disconsolate, Erebus."

"A little touch o' high life, I reckon, Mars' Edgah," explained the faithful attendant, somewhat confused at being addressed so familiarly, and unconsciously rubbing gentle reminders of the cane.

"That accounts for the time he took," contended Tony impatiently. "I'll warrant he looked out for himself on the way."

Poe protested that he would not hear his one and only slave berated.

"Come, drink with us, Mr. Pelham," he suggested hospitably. "We will have a milk punch, if you like. You drink the milk and we'll drink the punch, eh, Tony?"

"I think it would be wiser for you to

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join me, sir," responded the secretary dryly. "I have just been defending you at some risk to myself, sir."

Poe looked up from his glass quizzically.

"What!" he exclaimed, "is the governor in another whirlwind? Dear old dad! He *will* worry so about nothing. I have told him I can stop whenever I want to. Now, Tony, I leave it to you; if a man can't stop, there is some use of stopping; but when he can, where is the use, eh?"

Tony nodded with deep philosophical approval.

"I don't see myself," he drawled weightily; "but this is a digression."

Poe raised his glass exuberantly. A sudden fluttering seemed to fill the air about him. His lip trembled and he sank weakly against the table. A strange, deathlike pallor crossed his cheek.

"What is it, Edgar?" cried his friend in consternation, seizing his arm to support him.

"Did you not see?" cried Poe, in suppressed, awe-stricken tone. "Did you not see the wing of a big black bird cast its shadow across my cup?"

To Poe another world had spoken, as though in prophecy.

Tony read only from the cups.

"It's too early for that," he cried jovially and with some relief, for nothing could cast a shadow across his cup. "Come," he cried. "Here's to you, Mr. Pelham!" And raised his glass tauntingly.

The secretary, however, was not given an opportunity to express his contempt for the author of the malicious toast, nor Tony to drink to it, for Poe was on his feet with a sharp protest. Tony looked disconsolate at the prospect of delay. His glass was brimming in air; why wait? he thought, with good-natured impatience.

"Hold—not a drop, on your life!" commanded Poe spiritedly, as he, too, raised his glass, "until you toast the

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fairest flower of the South, Virginia Clemm!"

The clouds departed from Tony's brow and his lips were wreathed in smiles.

* The friends touched their glasses heartily: "Virginia Clemm! Virginia Clemm!"

Curiously enough, the secretary was the only one to show the effects, seemingly, of the beverage, in which his eyes and ears only had participated. Hastily replacing his glass, he moved quickly toward his desk on the veranda, where the increasing perturbation of his thoughts caused Mr. Allan's letters to fall from his trembling hands in a scattered pile. He stooped to gather them up, with the determination to move into the house, out of earshot of such roisterers, when a sealed letter caught his eye. He sank into a chair, opened and read it.

"Ye gods, I'd drink nine draughts to Virginia!" cried Tony, insinuating, by smack of lip and twinkle of eye toward Pelham, that he had exhausted his first

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draught and was ready to consider another.

"Or to any other lady under the moon," laughed Poe, pretending not to see the allusion.

Tony protested that he was fastidious in his drinks, and in his toasts as well.

"Well, Tony, how did you like the first drink?" inquired the young master of the house teasingly, pretending not to observe that his friend's eye was on the bottle.

The bibulous Tony reversed his empty cup sadly, and watched with sorrow and prayerful reverence depicted on every line of his countenance one or two tiny drops trickle to its rim and fall upon the earth.

"I never speak ill of the dead."

"'Tis the governor's best vintage, I promise you," laughed Poe; "I've sampled them all."

"It has a taste on the tongue I like," replied Tony, wistfully glancing again at the bottle; and then, unable to wait

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longer, he added: "Another drop, please; even a glass looks better full." His roguish eye fell again upon the veranda as he raised the bottle. "Why don't you join us, Mr. Pelham? What, refuse to toast the fair Virginia? Rumor says you had a fond eye for her once yourself."

The shot had its effect.

"Yes, Pelham," laughed Poe in friendly fashion, "they tell me you are my most dangerous rival."

"Indeed, I was not aware that I was so fortunate," sneered the secretary, visibly vexed at the allusion.

He clutched the letter which had attracted his attention and started for the main doorway to the house.

Suddenly the air was filled with song. It was like the song of a lark in the early morning, so rich and clear. Pelham, too, stopped at the door to listen. All eyes turned toward the path beyond the stile. The words became more distinct, and each recognized the voice of Virginia, though, indeed, she might have passed

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for a woodland nymph, so entwined she was with woodbine and honeysuckle and running roses. In one hand she held a bunch of wild flowers, violets, bluets, daisies, and wood anemones; in the other was a wreath which she had woven. She might have been the Goddess of Spring.

Poe's heart beat joyously at the picture. Running toward the stile, he cried hilariously:

"See, Tony, see, a vision of beauty; come, marshal the zephyrs, draw back the curtains of the sky, still the music of the streams, bid the great elms bow their crested heads! Virginia comes! Behold and listen!"

The girl mounted the stile over the wall to the garden, pretending, with becoming maidenly modesty, to be quite unconscious of her flattering ovation.

She formed a pretty and quaint picture in her light challis, so popular at the time, with her long black curls nodding saucily, and a bit of knotted ribbon caught by a rose relieving the youthful

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face. Her dress, with its little fringe of pale pink edging the ruffles, fell over hoops and swayed gently with each movement of the wearer, and beneath it peeped a tiny shoe laced with black ribbons. A much cherished sunshade added to the grace of the young girl, but was not considered to shade.

Poe caught her hand and assisted her to descend.

"Enchantress, we welcome thee!"

She smiled now at his wild adulation.

"You will not sue me for trespassing, Cousin Edgar?" she inquired playfully, looking about and greeting also the others. "I see that I am a lone woman entering a den of lions, and no Daniel to protect me."

Her pleasantry brought forth a chorus of protests, in which even Pelham joined.

"I'll be your Daniel, Miss Virginia," cried Tony eagerly.

"What beast would harm the wild rose?" laughingly queried Poe, one hand on his heart.

Virginia playfully imitated him and called him a flatterer.

"Afraid?" continued Poe, in a mock-heroic strain. "In a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honor and of cavaliers! I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult."

Burke's words in honor of Marie Antoinette were greeted with a burst of applause; for Tony was a *claque* unto himself, with his "Bravos!" and his "Encores!" Pelham scowled grimly; Virginia naïvely intimated that the words were aptly quoted by one who had never worn a sword.

"Who is the gallant, Miss Virginia, to receive your crown of wild flowers?" intruded Pelham, encouraged by her salutation, and trying to appear nonchalant as he tossed his letters on a bench by the veranda and joined the merry group on the lawn, determined to have an open tilt, if need be, for the hand of the fair.

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He had brooded over his uncertain fortunes in the lady's eyes until he had convinced himself that faint heart never yet won fair lady. He overlooked the equally important dictum that the bold heart that wins her must have a sweet way of its own.

Virginia smiled again faintly as the secretary approached, her eyes stealing a sly glance at Poe.

"What, this?" she asked, tossing up the crown of wild flowers woven by her hands. "Isn't it pretty? I gathered these by the path through the woods. Why, this crown goes to the cavalier who would be the bravest if this were a veritable lion's den. Come, gentlemen, tell me, what would you do?"

There was a challenging glance of roguery in her eyes as she looked at the three men confronting her with worldly wits and arts, each eager to outdo in her sight the others.

"I reckon I'd ask the lion to take a little something," croaked Tony.

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"I reckon I'd take to the fence pretty lively," laughed Poe, with a wry but very honest look.

"And you, Mr. Pelham?" inquired Virginia encouragingly, for Virginia had the woman's art of talking to three men in one group, even when her accepted lover was one of them, and not excluding any. Pelham glowed with pride as his name was called. Even his heart grew pedantic in its important beats.

"O Miss Virginia!" he began, with a pomposity so impressive as quite to vanquish his rivals, "I wish the test were here that you might know where sits the truest heart and bravest hand. I would fight until the ruby drops——"

His earnestness was so intense that there is no telling to what heights of noble deeds his tongue might have committed him had not Virginia broken in upon him with sweetly modulated protests.

"O Mr. Pelham!" she cried suspiciously, "your valor would ooze out be-

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fore the ruby drops, I fear, and you would take to your heels before Tony could extend his invitation or Edgar scale the fence. No, truth is its own reward. Edgar is the victor."

"But mine would have been a running fight," protested Poe before the secretary had time to realize that his winged words had flown far from the target of his desire.

"Discretion is the better part of valor," pronounced Virginia, quite judicially. The verdict was in, and there was no gainsaying it.

The young master approached ceremoniously, as if the girl were in truth a queen, knelt formally on the sward, and bowed low his head.

Virginia placed the wreath of flowers upon his brow, and the observant might perhaps have suspected that she had made the crown to fit that brow, it rested there so gracefully.

"I crown thee, Edgar, my champion protector, knight of my heart!"

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Her so-called knight covered his make-believe sovereign's hand with such a profusion of grateful kisses, as seeming evidence of fealty, that she was forced to withdraw it, with a command to "Rise, Sir Knight."

Poe sprang to his feet, saluted the lady who had named him the one of her choice, and, strutting with a boastful air, good-naturedly taunted Pelham:

"How like you my coronation, brother Pelham? Was ever prince more nobly crowned?"

The secretary turned away.

"I have no leisure for this child's play, Mr. Poe." He crossed to Virginia, kissed her hand, and saluted her.

He again caught up his papers hurriedly, his white face became one shade paler, but, otherwise, there was no evidence of the bitterness within, unless evinced by the determined step as he turned toward John Allan's library.

"There is your bird of omen which cast a shadow across your cup, Mr. Poe,"

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he said, pointing to a large black bird, which crossed the sky, while the group followed its flight with their eyes.

"It is only a crow," cried Tony.
"We'll drink to him."

Edgar Poe grew white and cold, but seeing Virginia's frightened gaze he whispered: "A shadow of the past, sweetheart, that is all."

The merry trio had forgotten the bird before Pelham reached the mansion, but upon the steps he once more turned and with an evil glance stilled the laughter. Then he entered the house, and closed the door behind him none too gently.

CHAPTER VII

Only Three of Us Left?

IF Pelham left his character behind him on his departure there was no malice engendered in its vivisection, for a peal of merry laughter and joyous badinage only followed the departing secretary, which did not add complacency to his humor.

"The angel has shut one lion's mouth with a bang!" cried Tony, pointing gleefully to the closed door. "You can tell by a man's back when he is at war with the world."

"And himself," added Virginia, ruefully dropping her eyes to the path.

"Yes, you have vanquished one lion, Virginia," whispered Poe ardently, "and not with love."

Their eyes met. It was for an in-

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stant only, but Tony's quick perception caught it.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, looking about sadly. "Only three of us left? I cannot stand this. I reckon I'd better go for your glove. Did you not forget your fan? That must be your kerchief down the path. Don't you understand? Where are your wits? Send me for your salts, a glass of water—anything!"

"Oh, you horrid fellow," protested Virginia, trying to hide her confusion.

"For staying so long?" asked the malicious Tony. "Hello, there goes my horse. You are so sorry he got away. Yes, oh, yes, I know; whoa, Charger, whoa there, whoa!"

He darted down the road at a breathless pace after his horse, which, not being interested in the displays of royalty, had slipped his bridle from the limb and was calmly starting homeward.

Poe and Virginia forgot their confusion for the instant at the temporary calamity of their friend. They ran to the

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summer house to have a better view of the race between horse and master.

"He is a merry boy," laughed Poe, as his friend tripped and rolled on the grass in his eager race. Then he realized that Virginia and he were alone and out of earshot of the mansion. He forgot Tony and the horse. "Quick, one kiss, Virginia," he demanded, slipping his arm about her slender waist.

She pouted gravely, and fled from his embrace into the summer house, made of lattice and running roses, quite like a moth into the flame.

"No, no more kisses," she replied, as he approached her ardently.

"Refuse me a kiss, one kiss, a paltry kiss?" he pleaded. "What, a niggard of a kiss? The zephyrs, playing in your glossy curls, rob you of them every day you live, as they lovingly pass by, and you never say them 'Nay'; the sunbeams wrest them from your lips to feed the daisies with; they are silvered by the moonbeams on a summer's night; the joy-

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ous song, bursting into bloom between these love lips, breathes millions of kisses into life. Why, worse than the hoarder of the mountain's gold, or the graybeard tottering to a lonely grave, clutching as some drowning man the jewels of a selfish life is the miser of a kiss."

She still stood obdurate, then darted from his reach and nestled in a corner of the arbor among the roses.

"I think I will keep my kisses for all that," she protested teasingly. "Your philosophy may suit some other girl who does not know you."

Poe approached her, knelt and impertuned. He had not yet learned that to ask is the lover's most hopeless way. Yet, he was born a great lover.

"Sweet Virginia," he argued passionately, "what is a kiss to you or me, if kept? It has no being. 'Tis useless on the owner's lips; while a fair exchange makes both more rich by the barter of such merchandise."

"Oh, my kisses are not rich unless exchanged for yours? A man's conceit!"

"No, I do not mean—" stammered Poe, in an effort to explain, which only made it worse. Then he tried another, a more experienced tack:

"Well, keep them, I can live without them."

He walked away indifferently, though his heart and lips were not indifferent.

"Indeed," pouted Virginia, her eyes wistfully following him, "how long?"

"A second!"

He was at her side again and waiting.

"Virginia, we are wasting time. Some one will come from the mansion house. Then I must wait until the moon is up."

"The moon!" His sweetheart laughed a little scornful laugh. "Oh, Luna is a formidable rival."

"How so?" asked Poe.

"Why, is not the Queen of Night the mistress of all poets? I suppose it was she who claimed you last night."

There was a tone of gentle reproach

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in her voice, together with a note of determination to teach her lover that neglect is the one crime in the category of the feminine mind not to be overlooked.

"No, truth to tell," explained the lover, "no spirit body claimed me last night. I was with Tony."

"With Tony?" she repeated suspiciously. "And you are sure no *spirits*——"

"Virginia," he laughed gayly, "you must learn not to ask such foolish questions."

"How did you spend the evening?" she repeated indifferently. "Come, confess."

"Telling fortunes," he replied with an air of equal indifference.

"With cards?" she asked incredulously. Her eyes twinkled between the lashes. He approached her tenderly.

"Nay, my love, telling your fortune, my fortune, in the stars."

"I'm sorry——" sighed Virginia sadly.

"Why?" he quickly asked, sitting be-

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side her and looking longingly into her eyes.

“—that ’tis not starlight now, that you might read my fortune.”

“Stars are not necessary,” he replied passionately; “for

“‘The brightness of her eyes would shame
those stars

As daylight doth a lamp!’”

“That’s what another wooer said to another lady,” she cried impatiently, “and, then, a poet told him what to say.”

“Begin, astrologer, begin,” she cried again. “My fortune was told but yesterday. I’ll see if you confirm it.”

He now was vexed.

“Who told it?” he asked jealously.

“A gypsy,” she replied with triumphant but downcast eyes. “He was very handsome, too.”

“No doubt,” said Poe, rising. “What did he tell?”

“He mentioned a dark gallant who

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was desperately in love with me, and another who was likely to become a very desperate rival."

"Perhaps he meant Pelham." Poe laughed heartily at the thought of it.

Then, with great formality, he waived Virginia to a seat in the center of the arbor, and enthroned her among the roses like a fairy queen.

"Come, sit very still, and I'll convince you that I am a prince of necromancy. Do not be frightened as I cast the horoscope."

She obeyed reluctantly.

He put his finger warningly to his lips, then solemnly drew his kerchief from his pocket and folded it strangely.

"Hush! if you laugh, you will destroy the spell."

After several strange passes, he took the points of the folded handkerchief between the fingers of each hand and measured her features. She looked up at him wonderingly; for his manner was very serious.

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He began his incantations:

“ From eye to chin
It is too thin ;
From eye to ear
Much I fear ;
Across the eyes
The prize all lies——”

Before his sweetheart realized the ulterior designs of her willful lover, he had deftly covered her eyes and kissed her full upon the lips. She had no time for defense, and the inclination perhaps was wanting.

“ Whoa, there, whoa,” rang out in Tony’s gleeful voice, as his curly head popped through the roses of the arbor. “ I reckon I caught my horse too soon.”

There was a great scrambling and confusion as the lovers sought to convey the impression upon the unexpected visitor that everything was quite as it should be, and nothing as it should not be. Tony

laughed, which only added to their embarrassment.

"I came back to say good-by," he finally explained between peals of merriment. "I must really go this time. Mother does not know where I am."

He controlled himself at length, assumed a very pious air, and started as if to take his departure. Poe and Virginia followed to the lawn, pleading with him.

"What is your hurry, Tony?" asked the young man. "Oh, you need not fear. There is nothing more to see now, is there, Virginia?" He laughed in spite of himself. "You are not *de trop*, Tony—is he, Virginia?"

"Tony *de trop*?" exclaimed Virginia, with an air of haughty indignation, the last resort of the one who is caught. "Of course not. I wish he had come sooner."

Tony only laughed again. Poe looked serious this time.

"Oh, *I* am not *de trop*," explained Tony, to the continued annoyance of his

friends. "It is the lovers that are always *de trop* in this world. That is the reason they leave the earth for little pilgrimages among the clouds."

He pirouetted around on one foot gleefully.

"Hard-hearted scoffer," protested Virginia, hitting their tormentor playfully with a rose.

"I'll buy your silence if it takes the governor's last drop," laughed Poe. His eye had fallen upon the contents still remaining in the bottle on the table on the lawn. Tony's eye was on it, too. Tony had his price, and his friend knew it. "Here, fill a stirrup cup," laughed Poe in desperation. "We must buy your silence if it takes the governor's last drop!" He handed Tony a goblet running to the brim.

"Don't force me or I shall have to yield," cried Tony, catching up the glass before there was any chance of the offer being countermanded. "None of our family ever could say 'No'—but

that's a digression," he added apologetically. "Fill, fill; here's to my sweetheart!"

The lovers looked at each other in blank astonishment. Tony had never been known to center his affections upon any one girl in all his life.

"Your sweetheart, Tony!" they cried in surprise.

"Have you not heard?" blandly inquired the irrepressible visitor, but not before he had drained the contents of another glass and caught up the bottle. "I thought everyone knew that," he added knowingly.

"Who is she, Tony?" Poe and Virginia demanded in one breath.

With quizzical dignity, Tony raised the bottle and, looking at it with eyes of love, exclaimed with a sigh:

"Merry Whisky!"

There was a peal of laughter, but the connoisseur of all beverages was quite grave. He protested that he was in earnest. Then, affectionately embracing the

bottle once again to his friend's amusement, he began to extol the virtues of "his sweetheart."

"There's a figure for you," he cried gratefully. "Show me a more swanlike neck or a sweeter pucker to the lips. We have our lover's quarrels, too, but they are short. Father objects to our union. *Sub rosa*, he's in love with her himself. Oh, merry, you are the dearest love a man ever had, so soothing, so confiding, so demonstrative. I am never so happy as when we are together. Sweet one, you inspire me with new life and hope. My veins leap for joy at your approach. I swear 'Merry Whisky' shall never know so true a lover as Tony Preston."

His bit of raillery was so characteristic that Virginia and Poe could not but forgive him for returning at the wrong moment. Indeed, they embraced him gleefully as he pronounced the last words of his little pleasantry.

The glasses were again filled, and the voices of the three, thoughtless of the fu-

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ture, caught up in happy unison the words of Tom Moore:

“ Then quick, we have but a second ;
Fill round the cup while you may,
For time, the churl, hath beckoned,
And we must away, away.”

Though there was a note of warning in the poet's exaltation, the trio saw it not.

CHAPTER VIII

And I Love You!

THE song had died away; the glasses had been clinked for the last time that afternoon. Tony, in a most complacent humor, had placed his foot in the stirrup and sprang to the saddle, preparatory to a gallop homeward.

Virginia patted the horse playfully and called him a "jolly good fellow."

"Who?" asked Tony, as he looked up inquiringly from inspecting the girths beneath him.

"Why, the horse, to be sure," replied Virginia, smiling.

Tony intimated that he did not wonder at her praise of an animal that had shown sufficient intelligence to make his exit at quite the proper cue that afternoon, and now was to bear his master well out of earshot.

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"I was about to put this rose in the rider's lapel," laughed Virginia vexedly, "but now the charger, not the master, shall wear it."

She fastened the rose in the bridle. The beautiful animal showed his appreciation by trying in vain to nip its petals.

"Now, see that you take your rider straight home; no meanderings," commanded Virginia.

"No meanderings," replied Tony, saluting, jockeylike, with his whip.

He took up the reins. Poe found a point of vantage high on the wall from which to wave his boyhood friend a farewell. Virginia laughingly swung open the gate to let him pass.

Before the horse could pass through to the public road, however, the attention of all was arrested by sounds from the house.

"No, no, no," was heard in John Allan's familiar voice. The tones were excited—angry.

"Do not be too hard, Mr. Allan,"

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pleaded Pelham, with a hypocritical ring of sympathetic regret. "I may have been mistaken, sir."

John Allan, followed by his cringing secretary, strenuously descended the steps from the mansion house.

"No, no, no," reiterated the master firmly, "don't excuse him, sir; in everything he has opposed my will."

Poe caught sight of the planter as he walked to the lawn. There was a boyish gleam of delight in his eyes.

"Here is father," he cried joyfully to his comrades, "come to join our revel. Dismount, Tony, dismount; we'll toast the governor!"

"You have had your last revel here," sharply responded the planter.

Poe's hand fell in surprise, as he replaced upon the table the glass he had so joyously taken up. Virginia stood speechless. Tony drew closer the rein of his good horse, as he quickly leaped to the ground. A silence fell upon the scene like a pall, which was filled with

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uncertainty for those who had recognized the tone of anger in the master's voice and which boded something ill, they knew not what. Mrs. Allan, too, came quickly from the house, where, from the window, she had watched, with furtive glances and a pleased smile, the young people enjoying themselves upon the lawn.

Poe broke the silence.

"Father, Cousin Virginia is present. Let us settle any misunderstandings some time when we are alone."

The old gentleman trembled with passion, which had grown for many days with the "meat it fed on."

"The world can witness my final resolution, sir. I have endured your prodigalities as long as I can. You must leave this place at once. I disinherit you."

A shock of sorrow shot through the hearts of the little circle of loving witnesses. The father stood rigid; the son looked calmly, sadly at him.

"John, what are you saying?" plead-

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ed Mrs. Allan in a voice choked with the emotions of motherly love and sympathy. She tried to restrain her husband with a gentle pressure of her hand.

He made no answer, but moved stubbornly beyond her touch.

"Do you mean this, father?" trembled on Poe's lips. His friends bent forward in anxiety to catch the planter's answer.

"'Father' me no more," fiercely commanded the old man. "I was your benefactor, your father, until you proved unworthy of my love. I gave you everything, even to my name. Read this, sir, read this."

He handed Poe a letter, which, in his anger, had been crumpled almost beyond recognition in his hand. Edgar took it calmly, respectfully. His eye glanced over it. A faint, sad smile played upon his sensitive, quivering lip.

"A college bill for \$1,600," he said softly. "Well, I acknowledge it. At least, I never hide my faults."

His reply was so manly that tears of

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loving admiration welled into Virginia's eyes. Tony pressed his friend's arm firmly to encourage him.

"Oh, it is not merely this," exclaimed the elder man in self-justification; for he saw that the sympathy of the unhappy witnesses to the scene of family dissension was not with him, and this only augmented his stubborn determination. "'Tis everything combined. You oppose my will; you upset the rules of my house; you cross me in everything; the high aspirations I had for you, you have blighted; you spend your hours with dissolute companions——"

"Father!" cried Poe, deeply hurt at a reflection so pointedly intended for Tony. He could stand injustice toward himself, but could not bear to hear an insult pronounced against his friend.

"John!" whispered Mrs. Allan reproachfully.

The remonstrances of mother and son had, however, no effect.

"You will drive me mad," continued

The Raven

the planter wildly. "You must go, sir; do you hear? Collect your traps, everything that belongs to you. Not another day shall you spend beneath this roof. Here is some money for a new start, and God go with you, sir."

For the first time Poe's eyes flashed in proud defiance, but he mastered himself; and his demeanor was still gentle. He drew himself to his full height. His voice was low, but trembled with emotion, as he quietly but firmly declined assistance.

"I could accept kindness from you as a son," he said, "but as a stranger never!" He took a step toward his foster father, who had done so much for him in the past, and who now had become so cruel to him, as if to plead with him for justice; stopped in doubt; then continued feelingly: "You bid me leave the only home I have ever known, the only father I remember. It is well. I would be too ungrateful not to obey your every wish—I will not say your command. Nor will

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I attempt to justify myself, sir, further than to say that I believe you do me wrong. You brought me up a child of luxury; wine flowed in fountains at your table; I was not taught what money meant; my associates were gay, and you laughed at my boyish follies. I have done wrong, sir, very wrong; but am I all to blame? "

John Allan sat on the bench where he had thrown himself, disconsolate but unyielding; one hand covered his eyes, the other hung loosely by his side, twitching nervously.

"Give me your hand, sir; you will not deny me that? "

The planter did not stir or raise his eyes. Poe knelt and kissed his hand.

His emotion seemed too much to bear as he arose to his feet.

"A good-by for you and the dear lady who took my mother's place," he whispered almost inaudibly. He clasped his foster mother tenderly in his arms.

She was too overcome to speak.

The Raven

He broke away from her loving arms and caught up his cloak and hat quickly from the table. He could not even *look* at Virginia; he had not the courage.

"Heaven bless you both," he whispered gratefully to his foster parents, "and grant that you may live to know that the little orphan boy you gave a home has a memory and a heart. I go alone into the world——"

There was a sharp cry.

"Not alone, Edgar!"

Virginia was in his arms; Erebus was kneeling by him.

His heart beat anxiously as he looked into his sweetheart's startled face.

"Reflect," he cried in anguish, "I am an outcast!"

"And I love you!" was the only answer in Virginia's eyes.

CHAPTER IX

The Black Cat

AND what a change! From the mansion of affluence to the dwellings of the poor; from liveried servants—nay, even slaves—to the little room where loving hands cheerfully wait upon their own; from the position of a young prince, respected, honored, the observed of all observers, winned, petted, and dined, to a poor, unappreciated poet, struggling with his pen for a pittance, and, too often, instead of that pittance to sustain the life of those he loved, meeting with rebuff, insult, the denial of even a reading of his verse. The ideal, and then the real. Standing at the well of life, the rich vase shattered by himself, he slaked his thirst wearily from one of the chipped pieces. Such was Poe, the poet and the youth; such was Poe, the poet and the man.

The Raven

Love was sweet, however, to Edgar Poe and his inspiration wife; even as wanderers in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, they found a temporary resting place. His pen transcribed the images of his thought, and they were weird and intense, but they were powerful, and while the world would not stop to pay, it stopped to listen. Virginia's love was too sensitive to reproach him.

Her health was not good, but she brought her husband the sympathies which made it possible for him to write great stories, rare poems.

One evening in their meager lodgings in the City of Brotherly Love the poet lounged at his table writing, first carelessly, then with a frenzy of hope and anxiety born of fear. He must win for her, for love in a cottage, Poe found, had all the romance while chance spun the webs of life, but it required gold—just a little—that monster that feeds upon the brain and heart of man—to make life all that it should be. The pity of it touched

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his heart, but the realization forced the truth upon him.

"What are you writing, Edgar?" asked Virginia, as she lay upon a couch beside him and watched with her lustrous eyes the meanderings of his pen.

"I am writing to Tony," was his reply.

"I am glad of that," she said; "Tony is so dear to us. He belongs to the past now," she continued.

"He is a friend," Poe said; "and he will belong to the future. Would we had more such friends!"

The poet's pen had run fitfully at first, then more intensely. His thoughts seemed to come to him in rapid vision, until he was overcome with them. They were simple thoughts, then wild and fretful thoughts, then tragic thoughts.

"Tony, Tony, Tony!" he must pour out his whole heart to the one friend of his boyhood days whom he could trust; to the one friend of his manhood days whom he felt could not comprehend his written thoughts, but who understood

and knew him. Life had grown so checkered for him and for Virginia since they were cast upon the world that he must pour out his soul to some one, and to whom if not to Tony?

“My own dear Tony,” he wrote at the top of the scroll. “I must speak to you to-night, for you take me back to the Richmond days, the days of love and hope and forgetfulness. You take me back to Charlottesville with all its rogueries. You have turned night into day for me so often, and now it is by the memory of that joyous laughter that my soul sits more lightly in its seat. I come to you as a child to its mother and tell you of my joy and sufferings. I shall not write the truth, for I dare not. I shall speak my fancy, the wild hallucinations of my brain, and you must judge what is true and what is false, for I write ’twixt fact and fancy. No poet ever told the truth—no poet could; but you know me, and rambling through the visions of my brain, which tear my soul as if it

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were swamped in the big maelstrom of life, for life has been that to me since our Richmond days; yet with it all, Virginia has been my constant guide and happiness, my hope, salvation; and as she lies asleep by my side, I think of Tony, my old friend Tony, and open my heart to him."

His pen stopped, for he felt the depression that comes with reduced circumstances, especially by night. He felt it bitterly, for he was unfortunately great enough to be able to realize the sadness of life's battle in which he was able to bring so little to the protection of the one he loved.

"For the most wild yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen," he wrote, "I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad, indeed, would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet mad am I not—and very truly do not dream, but to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul."

He paused, and his mind wandered back again to the Richmond days when he and Tony had ridden along the river banks and they had laughed and sang and were joyous. It was so changed now, but he did not regret, for he had chosen, and he was brave enough to fight alone and take the day as it came, whatever it might be. Yet, when he looked toward the couch at his sleeping wife, his heart sank within him.

"From my infancy," his pen ran on, "I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets.

"I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic animals, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds,

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goldfish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat."

He stopped, for a shudder had passed through his frame as he wrote the last word. There was something about a cat—his black cat—which was uncanny. He did not realize at the time what it meant, and the feeling passed away as he tiptoed to the couch, kissed his sleeping wife for momentary comfort, and returned to his letter.

He wrote on and on with tender fancy of his home life and of his feline friend, and smiled as he noted how the companion of his life had found in their cat the popular notion that it was a witch in disguise.

"Pluto—this was the cat's name," he wrote, "was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets."

His fancy then began to lead him

The Raven

astray, and built from a trifle a great tragedy.

He told how Pluto had eyes which strangely came to haunt him. Finally, he told how in his desperation therefrom he had taken his penknife from his waistcoat pocket, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut out one of its eyes from the socket.

He stopped again aghast, as he realized the damnable atrocity which his fancy had depicted.

Then he told of the hanging of the cat in his effort to destroy the haunting which its presence had brought him; how another cat was found by him, and welcomed by his wife in her sweet, innocent effort to bring back a companion for his loneliness.

It seemed now as if his pen ran riot under the wildness of his fancy, and he indited things to Tony of which he had never heretofore dreamed.

He went on to say that the second vis-

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itor was black, too, and also had one eye only, and that the remaining eye haunted him more terribly than that of the first. He described to Tony how one day the cat had followed him and his wife to the cellar depths, and how, uplifting the ax, and forgetting in his wrath the childish dread which had hitherto stayed his hand, he had aimed a blow at the animal, which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as he had wished; how this blow had been arrested by the hand of his wife; how, goaded by the interference into a rage more than demoniacal, he had withdrawn his arm from her grasp and had buried the ax in her brain; how she had fallen dead upon the spot without a groan.

With a wild cry Poe sprang from the desk where he had been writing, for his imagination had driven him to the point of the portrayal of facts too terrible. He turned back to the letter, however, and read his last words with a delirious eye,

The Raven

his hands trembling as he clutched the script still wet between his fingers.

He stopped and gasped. He had gone too far, and yet he had not gone far enough. He felt that the dénouement was yet beyond him, and that his mind had wandered far away from Tony. He realized the power of the story, and yet he had not half written it. He looked toward Virginia, and he shuddered at the crime toward her, even of his thought, but she was still asleep—sweetly asleep. He kissed her again, and she awoke and spoke to him.

“What are you doing, Edgar?” she asked.

“Only writing, just writing—always writing,” he said.

He turned to his desk and tore up the envelope addressed to Tony, and marked across the script: “The Black Cat.”

He would finish it, and it would bring food to the lips of the one whom he loved best, and yet had killed in fancy,

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but neither she nor Tony would ever know.

The clouds without grew gray in tint as they sifted the silver moonbeams, but even they did not penetrate the home where the poet wrote, for the shutters were closed, and the story of his heart was locked within those shutters, locked to Virginia's heart—locked to his own brain; but the moonbeams without danced upon the roof above him and in their midst, a mist, forming poetry's image, seemed to crown with a poet's wreath the poet's lodging.

CHAPTER X

*The World Is Slow to Recognize a
Genius*

THE ideal of life comes with a home, however humble, and the responsibilities come, too. Poe found the bitter with the sweet—only more bitter.

Weary years of struggle, of hope, and of disappointment were thus passed by him and his child-wife until, with their constant and loving companion and mother, Mrs. Clemm, that guardian angel of two great lives, they were finally located in the meager cottage on the King's Bridge Road at Fordham. Erebus, too, clung to them in their hour of need, and lent his cheer faithfully to their service.

Again the summer flew by in comparative happiness, for poverty is not so sad in summertime.

Then, too, the country was so beautiful that the imagination was filled with the balm of the air, the soft green of the foliage, and the restfulness of nature, which suggests peace and plenty. There was Harlem River flowing to the sea; Dyckman Bridge to wander by at night, the play of the moon shadows through its tall, cold arches, and the radiant lights of the growing city beyond.

Here he wandered through the woods and by the river with Virginia, and dreamed out his tales *grotesque* and *arabesque*, or sat alone in some woodland nook and noted on odd bits of paper the grim fancies which were bred of his loneliness, his responsibility, his ambitions, and his sadness.

The country folk often saw him sitting among the trees on some knoll or rocky elevation, his eyes lost on the landscape, brooding over life, nature, hope, and hopelessness. They would shake their heads and pass him undisturbed, for they knew him not. Indeed, who knew him

The Raven

or dreamed that the now frail body supporting the broad brow had a soul within eating out a life the world would one day wonder at?

So the summer days passed away.

The cherry tree by the little cottage grew red with fruit.

Poe and Virginia sat beneath its shade and laughed and talked to the wild birds that came to feed in its branches. Virginia called them her friends, and the poet did not mar her dream. He knew that they would fly away when the cherries were gone. And so they did—like friends.

The leaves fell, and he marked their falling. The winter came. Snow and ice covered the trees. The window panes were frosted in fantastic shapes as weird as his own fancies. The solitary cottage became bleak and cold.

Virginia coughed and longed for the summertime again. She seemed so weak and wan, except when a deceptive flush played upon her cheek. The mother and

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the husband scarcely dared to think of it, much less speak of it, though their eyes revealed their fear.

The poet wrote and wrote and trudged to the city over Dyckman Bridge. Sometimes he came back glad, oftener sad.

The storms raged more fiercely, and the little family was reduced to want.

Virginia still daily sighed for the summer verdure of the dear old cherry tree, that looked so hungry and forlorn in its garb of snow and ice. She almost forgot her own sorrows as she saw through the window its familiar limbs straining under the cold stalactites. Nature gave even the tree its burden in life. She wondered if the sun would ever warm its heart again and the robins swing in its branches, and Edgar and she sit beneath its shade and dream the hours away in happiness. She sighed as she thought how distant was the springtime.

This morning her face was white and drawn and the eyes burned with a piteous light. Her hair had been caught

carelessly together, with no attempt at beautifying the face. Her dress was of a pale gray, adding to the hopeless misery she bore. It was evidently some garment made over from her finer store, and one could see the slight figure plainly through the material.

She felt the wind whistle more shrilly than ever about the cottage, and her reverie was disturbed by her mother, Mrs. Clemm, coming in from the little kitchen, where she had been at work since the early morning hours upon her household duties and in trying by her thrift to make something out of nothing.

Unseen by Virginia, she slipped a roll of manuscript from under her apron and hid it among the poet's papers on the table, and proceeded with her work.

"Hush, mother, you will disturb Edgar."

The sweet old lady kissed her daughter tenderly. "A good morning to you, dear," she said cheerily. "I did not know that you were up. Here is a cup

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of tea and toast." It was all she could give Virginia for the meal that is the breaking of the fast. Indeed, it was practically all that was left; but Virginia did not know.

"And how is Eddie?" she asked anxiously.

"He has been working all night," replied the wife, nodding toward the room upstairs, "and he looks so wild and strange. Once or twice I stole into the room, but he would only stare at me with his deep, sad eyes, run his hands wildly through his hair, and plunge again into his work. It breaks my heart, mother dear."

"Poor Eddie!" sighed the mother, despite her effort to keep bright. "The darkest cloud has a silver lining, child. You must be brave."

She looked anxiously in the woodbox, only to find it empty, and the fire was very low. The wind moaned without. The snow drifted. The morning was so dark that a candle burned upon the table.

"I try to look happy and laugh for his sake when the road is roughest, mother. Edgar's pen runs night and day, and you know how meager the reward. What have we left for dinner?"

"Scarcely enough for one."

Indeed this was too true.

"Do not tell Edgar," whispered Virginia softly. "He has so much to bear."

Her thoughts were always first of him, as his were always first of her. It is easy to forget one's own sorrows.

She had barely finished her tea when Erebus passed the window. One could scarcely tell whether he was white or black for the snow on his clothes, his cap, his face. A bundle of sticks, which he had gathered for the fire, was in his arms.

"Here is Erebus now with an armful of wood," cried Mrs. Clemm joyfully as the servant crossed the threshold.

The faithful negro closed the door quickly behind him, to keep out the cold, and threw his load by the stove.

"Don' yo' worry, Miss Virginyah,"

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he chuckled; "wood jus' grow on trees up yah. Boo!" he continued, swinging his arms across his body to get them warm and breathing on his finger tips. "I don' like dis yah New York State fo' nothin'. Gib me ol' Virginyah!"

"Why, Erebus?" asked his young mistress, laughing through her tears, for the tears would somehow come into her eyes whenever she realized that they had one good friend left, even if he did have a black skin.

"Fo' de Lord, honey," replied the negro, "it 'pears like, up yah, dars nine mont's ob winter and free mont's ob damn late fall!"

"Erebus, what are you saying?"

"Pardon, Miss Virginyah," he replied, with an apologetic chuckle, "dat 'flection jus' slip out."

He saw that its author slipped out, too, to avoid further comment.

Virginia tried to laugh, but it was a sad laugh.

"Save those to cook Edgar's dinner,"

she whispered to her mother as she was about to heap some of the sticks upon the fire, "but do not let him know. I am not very cold."

"You angel!" cried the good old lady as she proceeded to disregard her daughter's injunction. She believed in making the most of the present and trusting the future to the future.

"Oh!" cried Virginia pathetically, "why will the world slander Edgar, mother? We know and love him. We are right."

Her last words came short and indistinct for her coughing. Her mother ran to her assistance, and helped her to a chair and sat beside her.

"A little patience."

"I am patient for myself," sighed Virginia pathetically; "but Edgar! He is so proud, noble, ambitious, and the worldly struggle, the insults and mockeries of common natures afflict him deeply."

Mrs. Clemm's motherly hand caressed Virginia's hair fondly.

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"The world is slow to recognize a genius," she said soothingly; "but when his words are known to his country's firesides, imprinted in the people's hearts, nothing can take them away. We will be proud of Edgar, truly."

"I *am* proud of Edgar, mother," replied the child-wife spiritedly, the light of love and the thought of him dancing in her glorious eyes, "proud of his great gifts. It shows that he is loved of God. But I did not know, when I threw myself into his arms that day in Richmond to meet the great world hand in hand, how the struggle would be all his, and what a burden I should be."

The young poet, who looked the old poet now, had entered the room unobserved. He wore a black coat of rough material, with black satin waistcoat and trousers fastening under his shoes with straps. His stock was of black silk, with unbleached muslin shirt. The lines in his face were deep with sadness. Brave though he was, he had suffered almost

beyond human endurance, and his sadness overcame him when he dwelt upon his inability to provide—even the necessities of life—for his loved ones. In his hand was a long roll of beautifully written script, and a quill pen lay half hidden among the black curls that fell over his delicate ear.

“And what a blessing!” he cried with animation, going quickly to the one he loved best of all and fondly kissing her.

“O Edgar, how you frightened me!” she exclaimed, with a little startled laugh of joy, as he put his arms about her.

“Come, what are these long faces for?” he asked cheerily. He kissed his wife affectionately once again. “Poor child, these lips were made for smiles and kisses!”

Even his manly efforts, however, could not relieve the little home of its grim sense of poverty.

He scarcely realized the threadbare condition of his own black coat and neat but worn stock; but he did realize, and

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bitterly, too, the poverty of her dress. His lips quivered self-reproachfully. He went to the table and arranged his manuscripts, humming an air, just to forget, or rather to make them forget.

"O Edgar," cried Virginia, observing his efforts to be cheerful, "even your jest is sickly! It is you who have the pale and careworn face. Has he not, mother?"

"It's those old goose quills," observed the old lady laconically, not without a bit of merry malice in her tone, looking up brightly from her knitting needles, for she lost no time that could add to the comfort of her children.

"Hush, Mother Clemm!" cried the poet reprovingly; "that's sacrilege. The world's best wisdom has run off a goose quill! Have faith, Muddy dear, *The Stilus*—aye, my magazine, *The Stilus*, will make us nabobs yet."

"*The Stilus*!" laughed Mrs. Clemm. "I believe more in the hoe. You work too hard the wrong way, my son."

The Raven

She shook her head in her quaint way and made the knitting needles fly again.

"Work too hard!" repeated the poet seriously. He had pulled up a little table and seated himself by the fire and was correcting his copy, though his thought was rather upon the philosophy of living than upon the fancies of his page. "No; though I admit, were I the builder of the world, work is an element I would omit most cheerfully." He shrugged his shoulders, and a grim, cynical look came over his pale features. He scratched away a blot and added a comma, for he was ever the artist, even in despair.

"We might be worse," sighed Virginia faintly.

She went to her poet-husband and put her hand sympathetically on his shoulder and looked encouragingly into his face.

"Hardly," he replied, gazing up at her with ardent eyes. "Is this the casket for such a jewel?" he asked petulantly. "You, Virginia, should have a palace; and you, dear mother, should have a

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farm, the best that wealth can buy. Perhaps—well, perhaps I may yet find the rainbow's end and stumble on my pot of gold."

He led his wife gently to the couch, which also he moved near the fire. He saw that her efforts to sympathize with him told upon her.

He knew that something must be done for her, and quickly, or it would be too late.

"Few get their deserts here, my boy," suggested the mother, who had lived longer and seen more, though she had suffered less.

Poe looked at her quizzically a moment.

"True," he observed humorously; "most of us get our deserts *hereafter*." He pointed grimly downward, then returned to his task at the table.

"It seems wrong," sighed Virginia, throwing herself back wearily upon the couch, "that some men, like our nearest neighbor down the road, should have so

The Raven

much more than he can use, and we so little."

The poet's eyes flashed proudly in an instant.

"There, there, my pretty, envious little wife!" he laughed, with a mighty effort to keep up the general cheer which meant so much to all. "Nature has her compensations; she divides her stores."

"He is so rich," complained Virginia.

"Rich!" exclaimed the poet, rising triumphantly. "Yes, he has vulgar wealth, a civilized barbarian! His name draws the bolts of iron vaults, and back swing the mighty doors; huge jewels light his path by night and make the sun ashamed by day; a retinue of men stand at his beck and call; his carriage waits; and on his walls of tapestry hang pictures which fashion tells him to admire! But, oh, my love, my name upon the check book of my dreamland bank draws forth a wealth this world has never seen. A mighty haze of glory, cloud palaces, and seraphim to wait on me, rivers of fire and the

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murky shores of death; fiends, goblins, ghastly raven-haunted ruins—all men—all things—jumbled in one black, trembling chaos!”

He laughed wildly, mockingly.

“Edgar, Edgar, stop!” cried Virginia, as she arose feebly and threw herself into his arms. “You frighten me!”

Poe’s bitterness melted into sadness instantly.

“And will not Virginia join me in my fancy’s palace?” he asked gayly, his lips still trembling, despite himself, with tender pathos. “’Tis the only one that I can build.”

“Love in a cottage would be more to my taste, dear,” replied Virginia sweetly. She looked with loving eyes upon him. It grieved her to think that her words might have made him suffer.

“Well, we have it here,” he suggested, looking about the little room half bitterly.

“It is all my fault,” cried Virginia, “that you have so much to bear.”

The Raven

“Why, Virginia,” he exclaimed, taking his wife gently in his arms and looking into her eyes with the fervor of a young lover in his first rapture, “I had not realized half of life until I knew thee. Oh, what a revelation! I, who swaggered with the youthful boast that I had tasted every cup, had not tasted one! Love, the soul’s guardian of perfect joy, I had not known.”

He played with her hair adoringly.

“Ah, less—less bright
The stars of the night
Than the eyes of the radiant girl!
And never a flake
That the vapor can make
With the moon-tints of purple and pearl,
Can vie with the modest Eulalie’s most un-
regarded curl—
Can compare with the bright-eyed Eulalie’s
most humble and careless curl.”

“Men always did *say* things well,” observed Mrs. Clemm dryly—a reflection

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which, for the instant, drove away the clouds.

"Then you never loved before?" questioned Virginia shyly. She could not ask too often, nor too often have him tell her of his love.

"Stupid girl!" cried Mrs. Clemm, who had watched the pretty scene with kindly eyes of motherly approval. "Have I not told you a thousand times never to let your husband know that you are jealous! And, above all, never let him know that you love him too well. It spoils men. If wives would only reverse things a little they would get more love."

The old lady thought she knew.

Even Virginia laughed.

Poe took her hand in his and kissed it.

How slender she was, how white, and yet how bright her eyes. Would she never be her old self again? His heart bespoke his hope; but his reason gave him little encouragement.

In her eyes he could see all the past—his mother's death, his own youth, the

The Raven

night when Virginia had promised him her heart and life, his banishment by his foster father, and the years of hardship since.

He wondered where Tony could be now. It had been so long, so long, since he had seen his friend.

He wondered what the morrow would bring forth.

To-morrow? He was forgetting himself. He must return to his work. It was their only hope.

He left the couch and went patiently to his labors.

For some minutes quiet reigned. Virginia dozed at intervals; the poet worked with acumen. The click of the knitting needles and the scratching of the pen made a sort of industrial music. The bobolink and the lark in their cages and the cat purring under the stove added notes of confidence and friendship.

The strange melodies were at last broken in upon by the master.

"Where are my *Stilus* letters, dear,

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and the prospectus?" he asked, not looking up. "Have you seen them?"

"I have them put away," replied Virginia, rising quickly. Poe, too, was on his feet in an instant, fearing that the effort might be too much for her. "No, let me get them," she pleaded. "I can do so little."

To humor her, he smiled and let her pass by him to the stairs, up which she climbed, very slowly, to his room above, humming an old plantation melody.

There was silence again until, among the writings on the table, Poe happened upon the rejected ones, which Mrs. Clemm had so cautiously placed there. He looked at them and then he looked at her.

"You played truant yesterday, Muddy," he finally said reprovngly. "You were in the city to sell my verses?" The mother nodded, continuing her knitting. "I would not have let you go through the storm had I known it." She smiled, but made no answer. He arose and went

to her. "You trudged the rounds, and they all said 'No'?" She nodded hopelessly. "Dear Muddy," he whispered softly, fondly kissing her. "Do not let Virginia know."

He returned to his task; but his pen had scarcely sought the ink when Erebus again entered, his arms full of wood, some of which was newly split. The negro was very gleeful under his huge load, and proud accordingly.

"Don' worry, Marsa," he muttered hopefully. "I'll soon hab a little fire fo' Miss Virginyah. Boo! Dis yah New York State!" He threw the wood with a triumphant bang into the woodbox by the stove.

Poe observed him critically.

"Where did you get the sticks, Erebus?" he finally asked.

"I'll soon hab a little fire dat'll warm yo' heart, Mars' Edgah!" Erebus chuckled evasively.

"There is no wood left on our place, Erebus."

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The negro only chuckled again knowingly in reply, and filled the stove.

"You know right well there is not," continued Poe firmly. "Answer me. Where did you get the wood?"

Erebus was speechless for the moment, but his mother wit came to his rescue.

"I don' track it in de snow, Mars," he said solemnly.

Poe arose and looked at him.

"Tracked it in the snow!" he exclaimed, amused in spite of himself. "Where?"

"Dat's 'tween de good Lawd an' me, Marsa," admitted the negro reluctantly.

"Erebus!" exclaimed Poe sharply.

"Yo' wouldn' 'spect Erebus, would you, Marsa, long as youse knowed him?"

"I'd only suspect you of too good a heart under your black skin, Erebus," observed the poet quietly. He could not but reflect that he had seen some days himself when he had thought almost anything was honest. He could not

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reprimand the negro while Virginia suffered.

To avoid revealing his true thoughts, which were conflicting as to his duty, he busied himself with a manuscript, rolling it out many feet in length, somewhat after the fashion of an Egyptian papyrus scroll, and examined it critically. Erebus busied himself with the fire, which, at best, only lessened the cold, for the windows and the doors of the cottage were not built to guard its occupants from the blasts of winter.

"What have you there?" asked Mrs. Clemm, trying to conceal her amusement at the episode.

"A few yards of my brains that go to the highest bidder," laughed the poet, with a pretense of merriment. "My stomach aspires to be the auctioneer. Boo! Jack Frost seems the only reliable patron of the poets." He danced to get warm, with a grotesque grimace. "Hello! Hear the sleigh bells. Some one is happy!" He caught up his hat and bun-

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dled his precious papers together hastily.

"I must be off to town, to fight the publishers—the rhymester's delight."

His jest was pathetic, indeed.

"Let me go fo' you, Mars'," pleaded Erebus.

"Not to-day, Erebus," chuckled the poet grimly, though he knew too well what a trip to the city meant for him. "I don't want you to track anything more in the snow."

"'Deed, I'se hones', Marsa," protested the negro profusely.

"Of course, we are all honest—even poets," laughed Poe.

The sleigh bells on the King's Bridge Road jingled again in merry time.

"Let me go, Edgar," suggested Mrs. Clemm earnestly. "You stay here and write and look after her."

"I can look after her better, I hope, by going," replied the poet, shaking his head, "and the trip is too hard for you. I must hurry and steal a ride, or trudge knee-deep in snow; and my sole has

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scarce the fortitude for that," he added grimly, glancing at his own worn boot, and then following in thought toward the stairs where she had gone. He could not wait for the "*Stilus* papers" now. "Kiss Virginia," he cried, "I cannot look into her eyes again till something's done. It breaks my heart. It breaks my heart."

He rolled his manuscripts closely, tucked them under his coat to protect them from the weather, and started, with a heavy heart hidden by a hopeful smile, toward the door.

CHAPTER XI

Sleigh Bells

THERE was a stamping and banging without—as if a regiment was coming. Before Poe could get to the door it swung open without formality, and Tony Preston—covered with snow—rushed, or rather blew, into the poet's arms. A cry of astonishment went up from those present; for, though they had not seen the optimistic Tony in years, no one could fail to recognize that jolly face or ever forget that infectious, boyish laugh.

“Well, this *is* a surprise,” cried Poe heartily. “Come right in and — get warm. Tony! Tony!”

The visitor did not observe the bitter irony in his friend's welcoming words, absorbed as he was by his own demonstrations of joy. He embraced the poet; he fairly hugged Mrs. Clemm, much to that

dear lady's discomfiture; and he came near embracing Erebus, too, in his mad excitement. Perhaps he still had a fellow-feeling for the negro who had once brought him the "governor's best," in Poe's glorious days.

"But how in the world did you find us, Tony?" cried Poe, overcome with delight, as he threw aside his manuscripts and hat, preparatory to making his visitor quite at home.

"I stopped at the house of a friend a few miles down the road," laughed Tony, "and picked up two 'turtledoves' who said they would show me the King's Bridge Road. Much good they did! Blind as bats!"

There was a gleam of mysterious pleasure in his eyes as he spoke, which aroused the curiosity of the poet and Mrs. Clemm. To their demands as to the whereabouts of said "turtledoves," Tony responded with a mysterious chuckle.

"They ought to be in the sleigh. They started with me. That's all I know."

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Mrs. Clemm's sympathetic heart was touched.

"They must be cold," she cried.

"Not they," gurgled Tony, with a mock lovelike sigh. "They don't know it's snowing. They are in love!"

Poe joined his friend in a hearty laugh at the expense of youthful sentiment; and even his present substantial sorrow seemed for the instant to be banished by the sunshine of his friend's happy face. Mother Clemm, however, took the affair more seriously. She ran to the window and strained her eyes.

"Why, I can't see a thing in the sleigh but a big fur robe," she protested innocently.

"Did you expect to?" asked Poe dryly.

He and Tony laughed again.

"Erebus, tie the horse and send them in."

The faithful negro hastened with a grin to obey the master's bidding. The excitement till now had been so great

that even Virginia's absence had not been noted. The poet ran to the door leading to the room above.

"Virginia! Virginia!" he called. "Come, quick! Here is a surprise for you."

Virginia descended quickly, with her hands full of the poet's precious papers; and her cry of "Tony!" was muffled in the utterance, for that worthy quite unceremoniously seized her in his arms, lifted her off her feet, and planted a kiss squarely on her lips.

Poe looked askance as his frail little wife fairly disappeared from view in the folds of Tony's big cloak, and his magazine prospectus was scattered ruthlessly upon the floor. He let his wife fight her own battles, however, and ran to the rescue of his precious papers, placing them safely out of reach of the barbarous intruder.

"Our old friend," cried Virginia joyfully, when she had recovered her feet, and incidentally her breath.

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"I beg your pardon," observed Tony solemnly. "Some years have passed, 'tis true, but still your young friend Tony. But that's a digression! Quite a family reunion, eh, Virginia?"

He held her at arms' length and looked at her, his big heart all in his eyes. A flush of color had crept into her cheek from the unusual excitement, and, for the instant, and for the instant only, her pale, wan face possessed again the light of youth and health. Then she coughed violently, and the color faded.

Tony noticed her expression hopefully, then anxiously, as he observed the fleeting changes in it.

"What are you doing? Playing sick? For shame!" cried Tony in the cheeriest voice; and then, fearful lest he might have said too much, he tried to divert her from herself by running to Mrs. Clemm and gleefully embracing her once more.

"How's Muddy, eh? Looking the brightest and the youngest of them all, in spite of that dyspepsia! I have just

come in time to help you run the hospital."

The good old lady dexterously avoided a third fearful hug.

Indeed, if a whirlwind had struck the little cottage at Fordham, it could not have been more effective than the arrival at this time from the "Old Dominion" of such a buoyant spirit of early friendship.

"You will be a fit subject for a hospital yourself," replied Poe, "if you don't restrain your arms and kisses more effectually in my family."

He proceeded to brush away the snow that had blown in about the door, as if to avoid the appearance even of the biting cold. His sensitive imagination made it doubly irritating to his pride to see it there.

"What a doctor you would make, Tony," cried Virginia, who was now reclining restfully on the couch. "Why, I begin to feel better already."

"His father intended him for a doc-

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tor," laughed the poet, "but somehow he never got his diploma."

"Never mind, *I* will give you a certificate of good professional standing," observed Virginia sympathetically; "for you have helped me more than all the medicines I have taken for weeks."

Before Tony could reply, the door opened and Erebus ushered in the "turtledoves." The negro's face was a study. To avoid being disrespectful, he kept it averted from his charges. His back, however, shook in spite of himself. The poet would have reprimanded him with a sharp glance or a word if he, too, had not at the same instant observed his visitors. After that one glance he dared not look at Erebus again, lest he should laugh himself.

The "guides" stood in the center of the room in a sort of daze, blinking sheepishly and leaning against each other. Their hair was ruffled, their hats awry.

"This is Mr. Carroll Brent, of Balti-

more, who is visiting my friend, Miss Dorothy Byrd," observed Tony gravely, "and this—" with a sly wink at Edgar—"is Mr. Brent's friend, Miss Marjary—" He coughed, to avoid revealing his ignorance of her name.

Carroll hastily came to his rescue with the lame explanation that the young lady was a "neighbor—a recently arrived neighbor."

"Oh, yes, a neighbor—a very near neighbor," chuckled Tony quietly.

"We are glad to know you, and thank you for showing Mr. Preston the way," quickly observed the master of the cottage, to avoid any further embarrassment on the part of his young visitors.

"You must thank Mr. Brent," stammered Marjary, with a languishing look at her escort. "I am a newcomer, too, and don't know the roads hereabouts; but Mr. Brent knows everything."

"How fortunate for you," observed Virginia encouragingly.

"I am a fortunate girl," sighed the

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young lady, dropping the lashes of her eyes modestly, so as to quite hide the lustrous orbs from view.

"I fear you are cold," suggested Mrs. Clemm, whose motherly nature still failed to observe the humor in the situation. She was touched only with a desire to make the young people comfortable.

"Oh, not in the least cold," protested Marjary, scarcely able to keep her eyes off Carroll.

The old lady, without regard, however, to the protestation, placed two straight-backed chairs side by side by the fire and bade them be seated.

"Oh, not a bit cold," repeated Carroll, while a flush of confusion spread over his boyish countenance, as he removed his mittens and moved toward the proffered chairs.

"Oh, not a bit cold, I am sure," chimed in Tony, who could no longer restrain his propensity to tease. "They sat together on the back seat."

"O Mr. Preston," exclaimed the shyly pretty Marjary with a frightened look.

She tried to hide her confusion by dropping into one chair, an example which was followed quickly by her mate.

"And you and 'Merry Whisky' drove?" inquired Poe of Tony, to turn the laugh upon one who, he thought, could better stand it.

The laugh was a hearty one, too; for Tony joined in it at his own expense. He was always flattered at a reference to his bibulous triumphs. It was a matter of family pride and family duty.

The young people only stared. They did not understand the allusion.

Mrs. Clemm straightway busied herself in fruitless efforts to make the young visitors feel quite at home. Virginia rested again on the couch, to regain her strength after the excitement. She had forgotten that she was cold and faint.

"It is good to see you again, old fellow," Poe hastened to observe, to divert his friend's attention from the sad sur-

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roundings. He thought he had seen a look come into Tony's face as if he realized the too apparent poverty in the little home. Indeed, the poet felt there was much more than he actually saw revealed in his old comrade's face. His sensitiveness made his perceptions the keener. "It sends us back to the days when buoyant youth sent hope coursing through our veins," he continued with forced hilarity. "Come, throw off your cloak and stay awhile. Courtesy is blind with joy."

"Thank you, I will keep it on," said Tony evasively, adding quickly, as he saw a pained look in his friend's eyes, "I am a little chilly from riding, if my friends are not." He glanced furtively in the direction of his guides. "It is bitter cold out to-day."

"I forgot," stammered Poe softly, his lips trembling with emotion. "You will be more comfortable with it on."

Tony glanced in the direction of Virginia. Her eyes were momentarily closed

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restfully. He drew his friend closer to him and spoke low, not without difficulty, for he suffered as truly as his host:

“Edgar, let me speak plainly to you. Why did you not let me know that you were in trouble—I must speak it—in want? I would have come at once; you know it.”

“There is nothing that I need,” replied Poe coldly.

Virginia coughed.

“And is there nothing that she needs?” asked Tony, as he put his hand on the poet’s shoulder.

“Ah, dear friend,” he continued, as Poe’s eyes restlessly sought the floor, “this is not the time for pride. Bad luck! The cards have been against you, Edgar; and, when the game is yours, why, you can repay the bank. Willis’s words in the *Home Journal* about your suffering have brought me *post haste* from Richmond.”

“They were false,” stammered the poet. “He is——”

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“—your friend.” Tony finished the sentence.

Poe glanced sadly at his wife, then his eyes sought his friend's.

“You are right, Tony!” he finally admitted bitterly. “You are right. For her sake; yes. But one more chance. I will go to the city with you and try to coin this last expenditure of a weary brain.” He caught up from the table the roll of closely, clearly written manuscript upon which he had been working. “If I fail, you may help—Virginia,” he whispered softly, “and God will bless you for it. I have sometimes thought I had no friends.”

“When foolish pride shut the door upon them,” smiled Tony reprovingly.

They understood each other once again.

“What are you talking about over there?” asked Virginia, unable to withhold her curiosity a moment longer. “You are not a bit polite. We have visitors.”

Tony chuckled as he glanced again in the direction she indicated, toward his lovelorn "turtledoves." There they still sat by the fire supremely happy and oblivious to all but themselves. Even Mrs. Clemm by this time had given up her hospitable efforts to entertain them, and was complacently engrossed again with her knitting.

"The doctors have been holding a consultation, Virginia," explained Tony apologetically, approaching her with a courageous air. He now believed that his mission to Fordham would soon be accomplished, and that his wits would find a way to bring comfort into his friends' home, despite the awful monster "Pride," which, as he had anticipated, stood guard at the door.

"Nonsense!" protested Virginia. "Last night I dreamed I would live a hundred years. Shall I not, mother?"

Mrs. Clemm caught up a dropped stitch in her knitting, and replied optimistically: "I hope so, child."

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Tony seated himself on the edge of the couch by his would-be patient.

"Here, let me feel your 'pult,' as old 'Doc' Mixum, down home, used to say." He caught up Virginia's wrist and fumbled clumsily for the evidence of her heart beats.

"You cannot find it," laughed Virginia. "You are a clever doctor!"

"Well, I can hold your hand and prescribe."

"I like that," said Poe, smiling.

"So do I," laughed Virginia; for, with the feminine instinct, it made her happier to observe even playful evidences of her husband's love. "You must promise not to give me bad medicine."

"Bad medicine!" cried Tony, an epicurean light of anticipation flashing in his eyes. "Wait until you taste it. I begin to feel sick myself when I think of it. I will join you—dose for dose!"

"Then you propose a liquid diet," remarked Poe, with conviction.

"What is it, Tony, come?" inquired the wife eagerly.

Tony became very grave and professional.

Poe and Mrs. Clemm exchanged glances of approval, as they observed a little of Virginia's dear bright self return. It was good to see her take an interest.

"I prescribe," Tony began, pursing his lips and twisting his eyebrows after the fashion of the kind old Richmond doctor, whom they all remembered and loved; "I prescribe—a big reunion dinner, well cooked, slowly eaten, and—to use the homely but expressive phrase—well washed down."

"You have not changed a bit, Tony," laughed Virginia.

"Changed!" cried Tony, glad to note the effectiveness of his words. "You can't improve us angels, Virginia. But that's another digression. I'm on earth to teach you mortals how to cook."

He directed the final sentence of his

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observation quite pointedly at Mrs. Clemm. He remembered that the culinary art was one of her weaknesses, and that he had had some little differences with her in the Richmond days upon its points of excellence, which had ended, when argument failed, in her pronouncing the young Southerner a "gourmond."

"That's the first time I ever heard of an angel cook," broke in Mrs. Clemm; "and I never saw the man yet who could cook. Mr. Clemm, Heaven rest his soul, thought he could, but—" She finished her remark with a shrug, which her hearers punctuated with laughter.

"A big dinner would kill me," cried Virginia, somewhat sorrowfully. "I cannot eat."

"Yes, but you *must*," insisted Tony. "That is what I prescribe for all my patients, with a good drink to top it off. It cures them all. Edgar and I will go to the city and bring back the dinner, and cook it, too."

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Mrs. Clemm did not deign to answer this second shaft at her skill in the art of arts otherwise than with another shudder in contempt of his ignorance.

The poet now appeared ten years younger. His face fairly beamed.

"I'm with you, Tony!" he cried, in boyish glee. "It shall be seasoned with jokes and spiced with jests and liquefied with laughter. Why, this is glorious, Tony. This is a lark for our Richmond days. Virginia and Muddy shall join us in our revel. It shall be a Bacchanalian feast. We will set up 'Little Love' as the God of Joy, and he shall pour the wine; and, for one short hour, Time shall be as nothing."

"Virginia and Muddy shall eat, eat, eat, nothing but eat," chimed in Tony. "Oh, it will cure you, Virginia!"

"Or kill her," suggested Mrs. Clemm, shaking her head dubiously.

"Mother is still skeptical about your cooking," laughed Poe playfully.

"I should think I was," said the old

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lady, confirming her son's reflection. "Unless Tony has changed materially, he *mixes* his dinners far better than he cooks them."

"Well," drawled Tony good-naturedly, "sometimes I do drink more than I drink other times."

"But never less," remarked Poe dryly.

"Don't you ever suffer from remorse, Tony?" asked Virginia slyly, when quiet was restored.

Poe again intruded:

"Remorse is born of a bad stomach, not a good conscience. Tony is safe both ways."

"One of my dinners cures everything, I tell you," repeated Tony. "You shall see for yourself. Come, Edgar. Keep a brave heart, Virginia; and, Mother Clemm, we will cure that dyspepsia as sure as——"

Mother Clemm put her hands to her ears, then motioned her tormentor to be gone. Poe hastened to make ready.

It seemed as if the very walls had

glowed and brightened under the spell of Tony's presence.

"We will not be long behind Tony's horses," cried the poet, "if he does not tip us out in the snow."

"The devil looks after his own," came sharply from the direction of the knitting needles.

"It is cruel to drive your horses so fast, Tony," pleaded Virginia sympathetically.

Tony snapped his whip.

"I drive them fast in winter to keep them warm," he protested. "Is that not kind?"

"And you drive them fast in summer to keep them cool, I suppose," remarked Poe.

"I am probably the best whip this side of the Rockies!" Tony declared evasively.

He looked in the direction of the fire, where sat Carroll and Marjary, lost in each other's eyes. Even the cat was now contemplating them curiously from a seat of vantage on the woodbox.

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"I am ready," he continued, with a wink at the others. "I am ready—Mr. Brent! Miss Marjary!"

The young people jumped to their feet, startled at the mention of their names. When they fully realized where they were, and that it was time to depart, they edged awkwardly to the door.

"We are glad you called," said Virginia sweetly, half rising.

They thanked her in confused unison.

"The front seat or the back seat, Mr. Preston?" asked Carroll, half turning to Tony.

"The back seat," replied the great whip, with the utmost solemnity, shutting the door after them hastily.

"Ten thousand hearts are beating

By the wild resounding sea;

Ten thousand hearts are beating

But not one heart beats for me!—

"Oh, I must tell you before we go," he continued laughingly. "What do you

think! I saw Pelham at the Astor House."

"Mr. Roscoe Pelham, A.M., of Virginia?" inquired the poet solemnly.

"Even he," replied Tony, in his most dignified manner.

"My old admirer," sighed Virginia, pretending deep interest. "I had almost forgotten him."

"*I* have not forgotten him," cried Poe, in a serio-comic, jealous tone. "He always went about with that benign look of one who continually smells something disagreeable."

"Yes," continued Tony, in the same highly eulogistic strain, "one of those lovable men who hates you if you don't hate everyone whom he hates. He would freeze the ocean in midsummer. He never liked me much."

"And you never liked him much."

"No," replied Tony grimly, "my dog wouldn't make friends with him. Never trust a man that your dog does not like. Some aunt left him a little money, they

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say, with which he has become quite a politician in Baltimore. You should have seen him to-day! His waistcoat was a marvel of elegance, and his stock—oh, his stock!—and he walked the office with an important air, his eyes fixed up there somewhere on vacancy. We'll bring him back with us."

"Yes, do," cried Virginia, glancing at her husband teasingly.

"If he comes," replied the poet gravely, "*I'll* cook *his* dinner."

He caught up his old military cloak, which had partly fallen upon the floor, and wrapped it carefully about his frail wife, who again lay upon the couch. She looked up at him with her big, pathetic eyes, dreading to have him go from her even for an instant, but bravely saying nothing.

"Good-by, sweetheart, good-by," he cried cheerily. He stooped down and kissed her fervently.

"You must take your cloak, Edgar," protested Virginia, when she realized

that he was the one to be the more exposed.

"Yes, you must, Eddie," insisted Mrs. Clemm.

"Tony has one for me in the sleigh," replied the poet.

Tony would have spoken, but Poe prevented him, fairly pushing his friend out the door.

There the poet would have fallen under the pressure of his emotions, but his friend caught him.

"Why am I haunted by these dark presentiments?" he asked, thinking always of his frail little shadow of a wife within. "Is it not enough that I suffer once, Tony, without living a life of fear and dread?" He looked in at the window and kissed his hand in farewell to her. "Ah, girl, will you leave me when the baby buds are laughing at flying winter, or fall like the autumn leaves, red as the evening glow of promise?"

A raven croaked in the distance, but none except the poet heard it.

CHAPTER XII

The Bolt Has Fallen

THE sleigh bells jingled merrily without.

Virginia had joined Mrs. Clemm at the window to see them drive away, with Erebus standing gleefully on one of the runners for a ride as far as the village store. The sight had filled her with a desire to snowball them, and her spirit might indeed have led her out into the snow had not a violent fit of coughing drawn her mother's attention to the fact that she was thoroughly chilled; and Mrs. Clemm hastened to the closet for the cough medicine—only to find that the bottle was empty.

The mother then returned to the window, hoping that, by some chance, the sleigh might yet be within hailing distance, but Tony's horses had passed out

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of sight; and concluding that she must adopt the lesser of two evils, she hastily wrapped her shawl about her head and shoulders and, making sure that Virginia for the moment was resting more quietly, slipped out into the snow and trudged away toward the store, a half mile off.

The last few remaining sticks, which Mrs. Clemm had put upon the fire before she left, were burning brightly.

For some minutes Virginia lay in a half sleep, occasionally drawing the worn military cloak more closely about her, the better to keep out the cold.

A little noise startled her. It was, however, only Katrina, the family cat, which crossed the floor and climbed upon the couch close to her mistress.

Virginia petted her dumb friend gratefully, and the cat crawled beneath the cover, giving warmth and comfort to the chilly loneliness by her sympathetic presence and purring.

“I am so glad you are here, pussy,”

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she whispered confidingly; "for I dread to be left alone—alone, even for a minute. I cannot understand it. They watch me so. I am not sick—that is, not very sick; and then my dream, was it not sweet? I dreamed that I would live a hundred years. How funny it will be to see the world and all my friends grown old! To see dear Edgar with white hair and brow chiseled with wrinkles, and Muddy hunting for the spectacles she says she will never wear!" She broke into a joyous laugh, but its echo in the forlorn little room was sepulchral. Katrina looked up wonderingly at her mistress, who only shuddered and held her pet closer as she talked on to her. "But would they all live a hundred years, too? No, no, I would be alone. Even you would not be here to comfort me, my kitten. The very thought is horrible. No, no, we shall all live a hundred years—all, all!"

Virginia sank back on the pillow and her eyes closed restfully. The clock

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ticked the minutes with a cold, sharp "tick, tick, tick!" She slept again.

She came to herself with a start, roused by a step at the door, followed by an uncertain rapping.

"Why does she knock?" she thought, as she raised herself upon her elbow. Then with an effort she called: "Come in, mother!" She sank back again indifferently upon the couch and waited.

"This is what I call a cold reception."

A man entered, well wrapped from the snow and cold.

Virginia was startled, but she did not rise.

"Who's there?" she asked nervously.

"Pardon the intrusion," continued the visitor, scarcely looking in the direction of the couch, for his mind was surprised at the bleak little room in the forlorn little cottage, which, in memory, he was comparing with the luxuries of a certain mansion on the banks of the James. "Is this the winter domicile of Mr. Edgar Allan Poe, the exalted poet?" he at

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length asked in a tone of mock reverence.

Virginia responded feebly, with sensitive pride:

"This is Mr. Poe's home, sir, but he is— Why, Mr. Pelham!"

The visitor looked at the invalid steadily for a moment, then he approached the couch where she lay.

"Virginia Clemm!" he exclaimed, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Virginia *Poe*!" she answered, correcting him. "I have not seen you for so long that I scarcely knew you." She extended her hand in welcome.

"Yes," muttered the visitor, almost mechanically, in reply, "separation has made me what inclination never has and never will—a stranger."

He stood by the couch, looking down at her sad face. If he had ever had a desire for revenge, it was surely his at this moment, at least from the view point of the material. Spiritual happiness was beyond his understanding.

"You are kind," said Virginia. "Draw up a chair. Excuse my not rising; I am not quite myself to-day."

Pelham drew a chair to her side, still struggling to realize that what he saw was not all a dream. He had expected to find an humble abode, but he had not expected one suggestive of want.

"And this is really the pretty, bright-eyed, laughing girl," he continued, as he sat beside her, "that married the handsomest man in Richmond and sought her fortunes in the North—envied by every Southern beauty?"

"I married the dearest man in all the world, Mr. Pelham."

"Of course, the dearest—" the one-time secretary hastened to reaffirm.

"You find me changed?" sighed Virginia, smiling kindly, though an uneasy expression flitted across her face.

"Not at all," he assured her, in his suavest manner. He had called in a spirit of curiosity, and wished to appear agreeable. "The same flush of health

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and pride is in your cheek. Time and the Muses have been good to you. Your husband's name is on the lips of all the world. You must be very happy—very happy.”

He seemed so earnest in his efforts to say pleasant things that Virginia attributed the painful contrast which might be drawn between his words and the sad surroundings only to his want of tact. She was always charitable to others. Yet, despite herself, a nervous foreboding crept through her weakened frame as they talked on.

“I *am* happy,” she repeated earnestly, then changed the subject to other channels. “It is kind of you to call. I hope you are well and prosperous. I love to know that all our friends are so. You moved to Baltimore, I hear, and deserted Richmond—dear old Richmond, where I first met Edgar!”

Pelham's frame shook slightly as she recalled the bygone days and mentioned the young master's name.

“And where you left so many friends to mourn your loss—not to say envy your bright fortune.” His lips trembled as he spoke, in spite of the smile upon them.

She evaded a direct reply.

“There have been many changes since then. Mr. Allan has passed away. Alas, he never understood Edgar!”

“His second wife and little ones enjoy the old home now,” observed the visitor, more quietly.

“They will never know how much until they lose it,” sighed Virginia, almost unconsciously.

Pelham’s thoughts were out, despite himself.

“*I* could buy the place these days,” he exclaimed with boastful pride. “You might have been mistress there, had you not found a better man.”

The words, for the instant, startled him as truly as they did Virginia. She arose, in spite of his protests, with a little cry. Yet there was surely nothing to fear. Her old friend had come as a

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friend to see her. She was nervous, that was all.

"I prophesied his greatness," added Pelham soothingly. He felt that he had gone too far, and could not recall the words.

Virginia trembled, but controlled her voice and manner.

"I must call my husband," she said quietly, she knew not why, for she knew her husband was far away. "He will be glad to see you."

There was no evasion in her words, however. She and the poet had grown so close to each other in sympathy that she felt she could call him even if miles intervened, and he would hear and know.

Pelham only smiled, and rose respectfully. He pushed his chair back and stood facing the anxious wife.

"Your husband passed me on the King's Bridge Road," he said; "but he did not bow—no, he did not bow."

"He did not see you, then," she answered.

The visitor uncomfortably dropped his eyes.

"I fear he has forgotten his old friend in the days of prosperity," he said bitterly.

Virginia's strength seemed to return. She raised her eyes to his reprovingly.

"He was never like that, Mr. Pelham."

The Baltimorean hesitated.

"I bought a volume of the poet's verses to-day in town," he said finally, but still in his ill-fated way. "I thought it would be a sign of respect to the past on my poor shelves—and—and perhaps contribute a trifle to——"

He instantly realized, however, the second error in his words when he saw the look in her eyes. His nature, not his purpose, was driving him farther away. There was no intention of irony in his voice or manner. He stammered an apology, then added:

"Well, report led me to believe that the purchase might not be ungratefully

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received, but I am glad to note that I can contribute nothing to add to your happiness or comfort."

Virginia only looked at him, with sad forgiveness written in her face. She swayed there before him, a shadow of her once glorious self—pale and pathetic and spiritlike. Her eyes only spoke as of yore, and they were beautiful. He realized for the first time that a woman with beautiful eyes is invincible—in youth, in age, in sickness, or in health.

He was conquered.

"I thank you for your call," she said with simple dignity.

He looked surprised at his dismissal.

"It was a pleasure I could not forego," he replied earnestly, and nothing that he had said had he meant more truly.

She bowed courteously. "Good day, Mr. Pelham."

Her meaning could no longer be misunderstood, although he did not understand the why of it. He covered his dismay quickly, however. "Good day,

The Raven

Miss—Mrs. Poe,” he said, with suppressed emotion.

He started for the door with a step almost as infirm as hers. His spirit, too, during the meeting had been greatly shaken.

His hand had raised the latch, when a cough attracted his attention. He turned his eyes. Virginia swayed, as if to fall. He ran to her and caught her in his arms.

“No, no, you must not!” she cried. “Edgar, Edgar!”

“Save your strength,” he pleaded, anxious for the outcome. “Let me help you; I fear he will not come.” He glanced toward the window.

“He will! He will!” she cried feverishly, and then fell again to coughing violently.

Pelham was at his wits’ end. He did not dare to leave her thus, with no one to look after her, and he hardly dared to stay. It was a moment of intense agony for him. He tried to keep her from falling. In answer to his appeals for reason

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she only coughed and cried for Edgar between the paroxysms.

It was with a sigh of relief that he saw the door open and the poet himself enter, followed by Mrs. Clemm, Tony, and Erebus.

"My God, Virginia! Pelham!" he cried. "What is the matter, love?" The poet caught his sobbing, hysterical wife in his strong arms.

"I knew you would come, I knew you would come!" was her only audible answer, as she rested her head close against his breast.

"'Twas fate that broke the sleigh and sent us back. What does this mean?" Poe looked at the visitor inquiringly.

Pelham made no reply. Poe repeated his question imperiously.

"I called to pay my respects, Mr. Poe," he said blandly, "and found your wife in this sad state."

Poe's eyes sought his eyes incredulously, but they were lowered to the floor. The husband turned to the wife.

The Raven

“ Speak, dear, what is it? ” he pleaded fearfully. “ You are safe—dearest! ”

She only coughed and sobbed and spoke his name in answer.

“ Poor child! ” cried the poet, trying in vain to comfort and quiet her. “ Help me, Tony. Some brandy, quick! ” He saw a strange look come over Virginia’s face, and it frightened him.

Fear had suddenly possessed her as once more she beheld before her the young master and the young secretary, rivals for her love, and realized the old-time dissension from which had sprung so much misfortune. She rallied, however, and laughed hysterically in a wild effort to divert her husband’s thought.

The little group stood about and looked at her in wonderment.

“ It is all right, Edgar, ” she cried. “ Mr. Pelham was only calling. He has been very kind to me. It is all right, Edgar. Say it is all right. You will not blame Mr. Pelham, will you? I was

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nervous and sick, but I am quite well now. Oh, I am so glad you came!" She laughed and almost danced ecstatically, to the consternation of the anxious ones about her.

"We will have such a merry time," she went on wildly; "a reunion dinner! Tony shall sit on one side of me and Edgar on the other. Such a merry time as we will have. I could sing for joy!"

She broke from the poet's arms and began to sing, as in the olden times:

"Then, quick! we have but a second;
Fill round the cup, while ye may,
For time, the churl, hath beckoned——"

Her voice broke. She coughed.

Poe caught her again in his arms.

She sank gently upon the couch.

He looked at her, his face pale with anxious horror.

"Virginia! Lenore!" he cried in anguish, falling on his knees and leaning over her. "Speak to me!"

The Raven

He tried to look into her half-closed eyes. He listened for her heart.

“ Ah, the bolt has fallen—dead, dead, dead! ”

The words came from his lips so softly they were scarcely audible, for even he could not then put the story of such a sorrow into words.

CHAPTER XIII

The Raven

THE obsequies over the poet's wife were very simple but impressive. A little gathering of friends followed the casket to a quiet place among the trees where the poet and his wife had often wandered in happy days. In this secluded spot they laid her to rest. A simple prayer was uttered by a neighboring parson.

The poet tossed a flower, which the departed one herself had grown in the cottage window, into the flakes of snow that slipped from the edges of the grave upon the coffin—the grave that was to him to mean rest and hope, where he might wander in solitude and commune with her spirit. Lethe! Lenore! Virginia!

His lips breathed softly as his eyes rested upon the casket below them:

The Raven

“ Ah, broken is the golden bowl ! the spirit
flown forever !

Let the bell toll !—a saintly soul floats on
the Stygian river ;

And Guy De Vere, hast thou no tear ?—
weep now, or never more !

“ See, on yon drear and rigid bier low lies
thy love, Lenore !

Come, let the burial rite be read—the
funeral song be sung !—

An anthem for the queenliest dead that
ever died so young,—

A dirge for her the doubly dead in that
she died so young.”

The little group looked at him wondering through tear-stained eyes. They scarce breathed in respectful silence, though they could not fathom the depths of his soul-racked utterance. The parson's prayer was nearer to their simple understanding.

When the services were over, Mrs. Clemm left for New York and Tony for

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the South, the latter taking Erebus with him as far as Baltimore. Poe had asked to be left alone with his sorrow, and they had humored him.

The sexton shook the poet by the hand. He, too, had tears in his eyes; for he was a country neighbor, and his work was not perfunctory only.

Poe hovered by the grave until all had gone. He even watched the sexton cover the coffin and smooth the snow gracefully about the earth which marked the spot until he could place a slab upon it.

When alone, he knelt by the grave in prayer.

Then he wrote with his finger in the snow the word "Virginia," like a greater but not a lovelier name, "writ in water." He erased the name and rewrote "Lenore!"

He started sadly homeward—not going directly, however, but wandering listlessly through the woods, until he finally came to the cottage where Vir-

ginia had passed away. The key grated in the lock. He had never noticed it before. He opened the door. A loneliness seemed to meet him. He wished for his friends. The air within rushed by him with a sad, cold hopelessness—like the breath of Death, trying to escape.

He stood for a moment on the threshold bewildered. The cottage home was so empty. Even his imagination had not foreseen how empty! He wished again that he had kept Virginia's mother with him or detained Erebus. It would have been too selfish, however, to have kept the faithful negro from an opportunity to go where he could perhaps find work; for he himself could do nothing for him. Mrs. Clemm would come back, be back on the morrow; but could he wait for her comforting presence, her motherly embrace and love?

He went to the window and looked out upon the snow and the leafless trees. The fire had sunk to embers, but he did not perceive it. Virginia's cherry tree bowed

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its branches tearfully. He scarcely noticed them. He stood there a long time leaning against the sill as in a daze. Nothing seemed real. Katrina, the cat, came to him and pressed against him sympathetically, but he did not feel her presence. Even the kitten seemed to know. The bobolink and the lark chirped in their cages. He heard them not.

He was like one dead in life.

A long time passed. How long he knew not. He came to himself, his lips audibly pronouncing the name of his departed wife.

He passed up the stairs nervously and looked about. His little table desk stood as he had left it—most of his papers carelessly scattered about—a few only arranged, by Virginia's hand, when laughingly she had complained of her poet's want of order and then—had kissed him.

He could not stay in the room, but returned below.

He peered into the cellar. It was like a breath of the grave to him.

He closed the door and fell upon the couch where Virginia had passed away.

Nature claimed her own; and the poet slept.

When he awoke it was dark. He sat up with a frightened start and looked about.

He lighted a candle. He fed Katrina and the birds, as Virginia was wont to do. He forgot himself.

His heart was beating very fast, but his brain now was very clear.

He sat at the table and took up his pen.

His thoughts seemed to come to him so clearly now. All was written in his brain in unmistakable syllables, where before they had been confused, despite the logic of his masterly theory of verse—that Beauty is the end and aim of art; that one hundred lines is the happiest length for expression in poetic phrase; that rhythm, tone, and climax must be obeyed.

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How long he had looked and wandered in vain for the most sadly beautiful theme in life!

He knew it now. He knew it too well. There was no doubt. It was the loss by the lover of his love.

He had racked his brain for the word of words to compose a refrain that would be equal to the poetic beauty of such a desolate theme.

He had it now. There was one word, and one word only:

“Nevermore!”

His heart expressed it; his brain approved it; his hand transcribed it.

It was echoed from the very walls that had echoed her voice and song and laughter often.

He leaned upon the table and buried his head upon his arms.

Strange noises seemed to come from every corner of the cottage—creakings—ghostly footsteps——

“Nevermore — nevermore — nevermore!”

The Raven

The rhythm of the awful word seemed to grow upon him.

No human throat could utter it with all its ghoulish mystery.

A raven only could croak its midnight meaning; a raven, the emblem of hopelessness; the antithesis of Lenore, the hopeful!

A raven—the night of his wretched soul; Lenore—its morning!

“Nevermore!”

He plunged into the awful climax of his thought and penned its final verse:

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—
prophet still if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us—
by that God we both adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within
the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the
angels name Lenore—

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom
the angels name Lenore.”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

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It was accomplished.

The other verses might be written at his leisure — mechanically — musically! To-morrow and to-morrow he would finish it.

The pen fell from his fingers and he slept again—his head upon his script.

There were few lines only on the page; but his soul's confession and his *In Memoriam* in them were given to the world!

CHAPTER XIV

You Know

THE spring had come once more. The woods and fields were full of hope for plenty in the harvest time; young hearts, too, were warmed with love.

“Carroll! Carroll!” called Marjary cautiously from behind the long curtains hiding one of the stately French windows leading to the veranda of her cousin Helen Whitman’s new house off the Fordham road, where they had lately taken up their residence for the summer. Helen Whitman was a poetess, and had sought out this beautiful country spot to be near her friend, Miss Byrd. It was at Miss Byrd’s that Tony had called on his memorable visit, when he found his love-blind guides, this very Marjary and her Carroll. There was a tapping, then a rapping, at the door. Marjary’s heart

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fluttered with hope that it might be Carroll, yet why such ceremony? She peeped out again into the moonlight and strained her ears and eyes. She could not see how Carroll could longer keep away.

“Why, it’s Parson Prime to see Cousin Helen!” she declared. “Why does he come? Nobody is waiting for him.”

She dodged back into the room well out of sight of the approaching visitor. A sharp knock at the door brought her to herself again.

“Oh, dear,” she cried. “He’ll ask all about my Sabbath-school lesson, and I—I can’t think of anything but Carroll.”

She caught up a ponderous volume from the table and pretended to be poring over its contents as she answered the door; but, in her excitement, her eyes saw nothing but black letters.

“Thank you, my dear, thank you,” observed the parson kindly, removing his hat as he entered. He was pleased to find one so young apparently so deep in religious meditation.

The Raven

“O Parson Prime, is it you?” asked Marjary, with a little effort at surprise. “I was so absorbed,” she added, looking up demurely.

“Very commendable, my dear,” said the old gentleman, patting her fondly on the head. “Pious industry is the greatest of virtues.”

“Yes, parson,” sighed Marjary, quite unconscious of what he had said, with a wistful glance over her shoulder toward the window to the veranda.

“And what were you reading in the Good Book?” asked the parson, with interest.

“Why—I—I was looking for Solomon and his wives,” stammered the young lady, quite losing her place again in her confused efforts to collect her thoughts.

“Solomon and his wives!” exclaimed the parson in astonishment. “A rather serious text, my child.”

“Yes—well,” stammered Marjary again, blushing rosily to the temples, “I wanted to see if any of them eloped—

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that is— Do you think it wicked to elope? All my family have eloped.”

She dropped her eyes in confusion. Her confession had led her into rather delicate family history.

“To be sure I do,” replied the parson, smiling. “Very wicked. Heaven keep such nonsense from your pretty head.”

He took the heavy volume from Marjary’s hand and examined it reverently.

“Why, this is not the Good Book!” he exclaimed in surprise, as he placed the volume on the table.

“Oh, dear, isn’t it, Parson Prime?” she asked in greater confusion.

The parson shook his finger at her gently in amiable reproof.

“Is your Cousin Helen in?” he finally asked, not wishing to embarrass one so young and pretty too deeply.

“Yes, Parson Prime,” cried Marjary quickly, glad of any excuse to change the theme; “I’ll call her.”

“Nay, nay, don’t disturb her poetical reflections,” insisted the good man, kind-

ly stopping her too eager flight. "Just bring the basket of provisions she promised for poor Miss Honeygood. I told her I would call for it."

It did not require a second invitation for Marjary to dash away and return with a basket, apparently well filled from the mountainous appearance of the snowy napkin which surmounted its rugged contents. A benign expression of thankfulness passed over the good man's face as he relieved his fair little parishioner of her heavy burden. He could not but realize how his parish had been blessed by the advent of Helen Whitman, poetess and philanthropist.

"And here is a little purse," added Marjary sweetly, placing it, too, carefully in the parson's hand. "I heard Cousin Helen say she was sure the parson could put it where it would do most good."

"So I can, my dear, so I can," he replied thankfully, as, truly unconscious of any humorous incongruity in his action,

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he innocently placed the purse safely in his own waistcoat pocket. "She will receive her reward in heaven."

At the reference to paradise, Marjary glanced again uneasily at the clock and at the window. To tell the whole truth, she was impatient, and it was not unnatural; for she had weighty matters on her mind. Her time had never been so precious as at that particular moment, and to be thus interrupted was disheartening. Perhaps Carroll was even now without.

The parson stood so long there in the middle of the room, cogitating and undecided, that she finally mustered courage to force the issue by asking, quite naïvely:

"Must you go so soon, parson?"

He had not even mentioned taking his departure; but, as the thought was so sharply brought to his attention, in his abstraction he did not realize that the idea was not his very own.

"Not a moment to stay, my dear," he exclaimed—still in the same spot, however, to Marjary's untold annoyance.

The Raven

“Miss Honeygood needs my constant visitation and prayers,” he observed ponderously. “This will be so welcome to the dear good sister. And then my Sabbath sermon is still incomplete, my dear. I must brush it up a little to-night.”

Marjary’s courage overleaped itself. “If you are so very busy, parson,” she asked, “couldn’t you make it a little shorter next Sunday?”

The parson stopped in amazement.

“My child,” he said reprovingly, “I never neglect my flock. I have a treat in store for my parishioners next Sunday. I shall discourse upon the twenty-third chapter of Proverbs, the twentieth verse: ‘Be not with wine bibbers.’ Did you place the little bottle of port in the basket? Miss Honeygood is very weak, poor soul.”

Marjary hastened to assure him that it was not forgotten, and a benign smile of complacent hopefulness played upon her religious adviser’s lips.

It seemed to her fluttering heart an age

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when the parson actually began to move toward the door.

“ Ah, your cousin’s sweet charity! ” he went on, bowing and smiling still in the open doorway. “ My compliments to her. Emulate her, emulate her, my dear.”

Marjary hastily assured him of her intention to devote her whole time to emulating the pious graces of her poetic relative, and proceeded to shut the door, but her eagerness was so great that the hem of his coat was caught. Several minutes more were required for apologies and courtesies and farewells before the parson was really gone. Marjary sighed heavily. It would be unkind to suggest that that sigh was entirely one of relief; it would be much kinder to interpret it as a determination of her little heart for pious endeavor. Be that as it may, however, her ear rested at the keyhole a moment until the steps grew faint on the path, and then she ran back to the window with an eagerness of anticipation in

The Raven

her eyes that made them sparkle with beauty in the flickering candlelight.

For some moments she stood behind the curtains again and watched and waited. She softly whistled the "Bob White" call to his mate. There was no answer. Did she not know that "Bob White" had been long in bed?

With a disappointed look on her pretty face she tripped back to the piano and took her place on the stool. Making sure that no one was within earshot and fumbling cautiously in her dress she produced a note. She did not read it, but spoke its contents softly, as in a reverie—her eyes falling furtively upon the missive, just to see, not without a gleam of pride, that she remembered it aright:

"MY OWN DEAR MARJARY:

"Meet me in the lane to-night by Miss Honeygood's, if I do not see you before. I have so much to tell you.

"From yours now and always,

"YOU KNOW."

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Carroll was a poet; there was no doubt of it in her mind.

“ ‘ You know!’ I have so much to tell him, too, I can’t remember it all.”

Her eyes wandered restlessly toward the window. She was sure she could read her letter more easily by the moonlight. All lovers in books had done so. She sprang up with joy, for she was convinced she caught a glimpse of a shadow—and the right shadow, too—among the beeches. She started eagerly toward the balcony, the steps of which descended to the pathway which opened into the lane before Miss Honeygood’s cottage, when her love flight was arrested by a step in the library and by her Cousin Helen’s sweet voice, the cadence of which she now failed utterly to appreciate.

She sighed and waited.

CHAPTER XV

And I Look Like Her

MARJARY disposed of her letter with a quickness that was phenomenal. Where it went no one but a woman knows, but it disappeared among the ruffles and lace at her throat. She ran to the table with a light step, and, picking up a volume of Helen Whitman's own poems, rested her head on one hand in a very literary attitude, which she felt sure would be observed approvingly by her cousin. She was thus apparently absorbed when the poetess herself drew back the portières and entered the room.

Helen Whitman, too, was intent upon a book, open in her hand. Indeed, everyone was always reading in her home, or supposed to be. She was gowned in white, a favorite color, or rather a meet-

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ing of all the colors, which enhanced her beauty.

A beautiful woman only can wear white, and Helen Whitman was in truth spiritually beautiful.

"Surely some one crossed the veranda," she said softly.

She smiled as she observed that Marjary was surely intent, for the first time in her life, upon one of her love poems, and was naturally surprised, for the family of a genius rarely read from the family store.

"Marjary, who was here just now?" she asked.

Marjary looked up with a startled glance, as if she had been disturbed in the depths of a heartfelt reverie.

"It was the parson," she replied, dropping the volume and looking at her cousin with a baby stare.

"Oh, has Dr. Prime been here?" There was a look of disappointment on Helen's face as she spoke.

"Yes, and gone, Cousin Helen," was

The Raven

the nervous reply. "I gave him the basket and the purse."

The poetess drew a chair to the table opposite her pretty cousin, and was soon intent upon her own book.

She wore a soft white silk, over which was sprinkled sprays of flowers in blue and pink. The dress hung away from the shoulders, and over the bodice was draped old yellow lace. In her ears were long strings of diamonds, set with pear-shaped amethysts. Her hair was lighter than Virginia's, and dressed high on her head, although the face was softened by clusters of ringlets at the temples.

They both read for some minutes, but Marjary could not for long interest herself in her cousin's verses, try as she would. She finally threw the volume down with a deep sigh, and started for her own room. Before she had arrived at the door, however, she turned and spoke her cousin's name hesitatingly and in a tone of inquiry.

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"Well, Marjary," answered the poetess sweetly, looking up.

"Cousin Helen," repeated Marjary, visibly embarrassed, "do you think—do you think—it is quite right to marry?"

"Right to marry!" said Helen Whitman, with a merry laugh and with a look capable of penetrating the inmost thoughts of the ingenuous girl. "Of course I do—holy—but at the proper age and time and place, sweet youthful cousin."

"And what is the proper age and time and place, dear Cousin Helen?"

"Why, when the man loves the girl so very much that he cannot help but marry her, and when the girl loves the man so very much that she can no longer help but marry him—then 'tis the time and rightful age to marry."

Marjary stood for a moment in uncertain thought. It was a big proposition for her little mind. Helen resumed her book with a knowing smile.

"And what is the proper place, dear-

est cousin?" Marjary at length again hesitatingly interrupted her to ask. "You forgot to name the place."

"When you reach the proper age and time, the place is highly proper," replied her elder knowingly.

"Thank you, dearest cousin," sighed Marjary. "Good night."

"Good night, Marjary, and pleasant dreams." Helen kissed her little kinswoman fondly.

"Good night," sighed Marjary again more deeply still. A great question had been decided for her. She was now convinced that she could no longer help but marry.

It was well that her cousin did not suspect quite all, as Marjary ran out of the room and up the stairs.

Helen looked after her and smiled. She saw that the little heart had begun to flutter. Indeed, she wished that her own heart were as bubbling over with sunshine; but she had lived to see her ideals shattered. She suddenly regretted

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that the parson had gone, and even went to the window to make sure that he had not returned; for she felt so strangely restless that she thought a few minutes' discourse with the good man might quiet her. Finally, she threw herself into a chair, and turned again for solace to the book which she had been reading.

She read several lines aloud, to further catch the mystic music, and marveled at their syllabic melody, as she pronounced, wonderingly, the words:

“ ‘ Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within
the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the
angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom
the angels name Lenore.’
Quoth the Raven, ‘ Nevermore.’ ”

She reread the verse again and again, pondering on “ Lenore.” Who or what was “ Lenore ”?

The Raven

She had asked herself a hundred times that night the question.

Then she threw the book aside impatiently; but she could not dismiss "The Raven" from her mind, try as she would.

On the little side table rested a miniature of Edgar Poe among her treasures. She took it up and studied the face long and earnestly. The more she gazed, the more enwrapped she seemed; for to know and commune with such a soul, she felt, would be for her Elysium. There was a man capable of that higher love that poets attribute only to woman. If the picture was so beautifully sad, what must the man himself be!

Then she broke into a laugh.

"O Helen, Helen, Helen! For shame!" she cried aloud in self-reproach. She went to the piano and ran over its ivory keys. She played simple strains of love; then complex music; then thought chords from the great Beethoven, interspersed with lively notes of the dance. It was the same. Music, that

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night, had no charm for her, and even the waltz sounded funereal. The notes broke like the wail of the sea on some barren rock.

She arose abruptly, went to the window, and stood there for a long, long time, looking into the night.

What a night!—a fairyland!—and what a moon!

She felt the impulsive desire of a young girl to stroll out alone and at night, and yet the neighbors annoyed her so. When she wandered forth under the moon, they seemed thunderstruck with wonder. Simple folk, they knew no better. There was more in one breath of night for her than in the breezes of a livelong day for them.

She threw a snowy scarf over her glorious hair, and prepared to go out through the long French window into the radiant night, when a step on the path stopped her. Who could be coming at such an hour? She trusted that it was not a visitor; for she was in no mood to

The Raven

be entertaining that night. She peered down the path. It was surely a stranger, advancing quickly. How curiously he acted; how strangely he stared as he stepped on the veranda and approached her, standing there in the open window.

She withdrew into the room and called for Marjary. Marjary, however, was by this time far away.

A man of ingenuous, pleasing face, but troubled look, was standing in the window, gazing intently at her. The name "Virginia" in a startled accent trembled on his lips as his only salutation. She looked at him in wonderment.

He only said "Virginia" once again, his eyes following raptly her every move.

"I beg your pardon, sir," answered Helen, startled a little at his manner, but not afraid, for she was fearless. "What do you want, and who are you?"

She stood by the piano with one hand resting on the keys, which her fingers

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tapped lightly, while her eyes questioned her strange visitor.

"You must pardon me," he stammered. "A miracle! You are the living image of a dear friend of mine."

"Indeed!" answered Helen with a kindly smile. She began to fear that her visitor was deranged.

"Her image!" he repeated mechanically, his eyes still fixed strangely upon her face.

"Her suggestion, possibly," said Helen calmly. She was no longer even startled, but interested rather.

"Oh, speak again," he pleaded pathetically; "the same sweet voice—her voice!"

Helen smiled again incredulously.

"I have heard of doubles in poetry and romance, sir," she observed somewhat skeptically, "but have never till now put faith in them."

"Pardon me," he repeated more quietly; for her calm manner had restored his self-possession. "I can scarcely master

The Raven

myself. It is all so strange. It will pass in a moment. I am not often frightened, madam, but—the moonlight, the hour, and the suddenness—once more, pardon me.”

He rubbed his hands across his eyes to make sure that he was awake, and looked at her steadfastly. The lady smiled and motioned him to a seat. He took it mechanically, his eyes still following her with a curious luster.

“She was so beautiful,” he continued with suppressed feelings. “Her husband has nearly lost his mind with grief.”

“Her husband!” exclaimed the poetess.

“Understand me, madam,” the visitor hastened to explain, “her husband and I are brothers in all but blood.”

“I appreciate your sympathy and regret I gave you pain unconsciously,” she said slowly. “What can I do to help you?”

“I had almost forgotten my trifling mission.” He fumbled in his pocket for

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a letter. "I wish to find—to find—" He looked at the superscription, then rubbed his hand across his eyes. In his confusion he could not collect his thoughts or scarcely read. "—to find—Helen Whitman—Helen Whitman."

"That is my name."

He arose and handed her the letter.

"Indeed, I should have known! I am Tony Preston, on my way to town from your neighbor's—I believe Miss Byrd is our mutual friend—and, at her request, I merely stopped to leave this note."

"Oh, indeed, from Dorothy?" the poetess, much relieved, exclaimed, as she observed the familiar handwriting. "Thank you; you are welcome."

"And as I came up the path," he continued, "your face was at the window; and, you see, I had just passed the spot among the trees where we laid her to rest nearly two years ago."

Helen bowed respectfully at the story of his sorrow.

"The grave by the path? I've seen the place," she said. "It is the shortest way to Dorothy's house. I like to stroll there myself; for I do not fear the dead—only the living."

She excused herself, opened and glanced over the contents of the note.

"I hope I am not the bearer of ill news, madam?" said Tony, when she had finished.

"A business note merely. Mr. Pelham, of Baltimore, manages some property for Dorothy and me."

Tony raised his eyes instantly at the mention of Pelham's name, but said nothing. The coincidence scarcely impressed itself upon him then, his mind was so preoccupied.

"Dorothy wishes me to come to her for a chat to-night about it," added the poetess. "I thank you for your trouble. Won't you step into the drawing-room? I'll order refreshments."

"I assure you," replied Tony, with an effort at a grateful smile, "that it is not

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my way to refuse the good things of life, but I have not the time to-night." He started to go, then stopped, and added earnestly: "I must ask you again to pardon my strange deportment, but you are so like Virginia Poe."

"Virginia Poe! Virginia Poe! Not the poet's wife?"

It was Helen Whitman's turn now to wonder.

"Yes, she that was," Tony explained reverently.

"Virginia Poe!" the poetess repeated tenderly. "It is a name that casts a spell over me. I had just put down 'The Raven' as you entered. I have many friends in common with the poet, but it has never been my good fortune to look upon his face."

"I remember now," said Tony thoughtfully, "though I did not know that you had moved into the neighborhood, and I am sure Poe did not. Helen Whitman is a name often on his lips."

"I am glad of that," she answered

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gratefully. "We have corresponded on several occasions, when I was in Providence and he in the South, and I hear he has hallowed some of my poor verses by speaking well of them."

"He admires your writing exceedingly, madam."

"How good of him!"

"You are almost the living image of his departed wife, though, now I look more closely, the hair and eyes are lighter, but the first impression is the same."

"Strange, I have not been told of this before!"

"No," Tony replied quickly, "Virginia was an invalid for years, and many of Poe's friends had never seen her."

He took up his hat and stepped toward the veranda.

"I am sorry you have to leave so soon," she said earnestly, wishing he would stay. She wanted to hear more and talk more.

"To tell the truth," explained her visitor, "I am anxious for Edgar Poe to-

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night. He left me in town early this morning and I have not seen him since. It may be foolish, but we are all that way sometimes—and—I am very fond of Mr. Poe. Good evening, madam.”

“Good evening, Mr. Preston,” she replied reluctantly.

“Good evening,” he repeated again, the same strange light coming into his eyes which had startled her when he first remarked the surprising likeness.

He turned quickly and was gone.

The meeting was not like one in life. Each in their own way was in the spiritual.

“His wife, whom he loved so tenderly; and I look like her! I wonder if he would think so? And if he did——”

She caught up again the lace scarf. A thrill of ecstasy and weird consciousness of the unknown passed through her.

There was truly something mysterious in the air, for even the crickets and the whip-poor-wills were hushed, and the owls seemed strangely silent.

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She had read somewhere a legend that the stars were but peepholes cut from the floor of heaven by curious gods to watch us mortals through, and that the azure bits that dropped therefrom had fallen to earth and made the violets. She hoped 'twas but a fable, for there was something sprung unbidden in her heart that night that she would keep even from God's eye.

She looked like Virginia—and the poet loved Virginia—loved Virginia!

CHAPTER XVI

Why Not To-night, Marjary?

EVERY community, large or small, has a lane where lovers wander. Even such a scattered hamlet as Fordham had its lane. The conventional trees bordered its pathway, and the limbs drooped with a kindly, protecting shade. There, also, the Harlem River lent a picturesque background to the scene, but its waters were too busy bearing their burdens to the sea to stop and listen. Here and there a cottage opened upon the pathway, but they were infrequent, and their inhabitants, with rural simplicity, retired soon after the shadows of night fell upon the forest.

On this night the moon at intervals peeped through the clouds and lighted the way for Cupid.

“Marjary! Marjary! Marjary!” was

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heard in a boyish voice where the path from the Whitman place met King's Bridge Road. "I wish she would come." Carroll spoke aloud for company.

It was not long before there was a plaintive answering note, a rustle of skirts, and the sound of running feet.

"Carroll, Carroll, is that you?" came from the shadow in a frightened tone.

"Of course it is," answered the impatient Carroll. "Who else could it be?"

He was jealous in a moment.

There was an embrace and a sound of a kiss. The moonlight drifted through a fleecy cloud.

"O Carroll!" cried Marjary fearfully, her head close upon his shoulder. "Did you see? Did you see?"

"See what?" he asked, with an appearance of bravery quite commendable, though his eyes followed his sweetheart's back through the shadows, whence she had come, with an anxious stare.

"Did you not see—a figure in white—moving among the trees—like a spirit?"

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"There's no such thing as spirits, Margary," he hastened to assure her dubiously; but there was a look in his boyish eyes that indicated that he feared an ocular demonstration of the falseness of his position.

"You never can tell," whispered Margary, trembling still. "Old Aunt Betty told me that there are spirits. Oh, see, there again through the trees!" She hugged Carroll closely—and he hugged her closely, too.

He drew her hastily into the shade of a giant oak, and there they stood, trembling with fear, but assured by their nearness to each other.

Some minutes passed, and nothing could be heard but the beating of their hearts and their anxious breathing. They found themselves at length still alive and unhurt, and Carroll's bravery returned. His courage seemed to appear and disappear with the moon.

"I can't see it now," whispered Margary, much relieved; then, with a little

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sob, she added: "I wish I were home. I wish I were home."

"Don't be afraid, Marjary—I'm here," whispered her lover, his arm drawing her closer to him, if possible—just for sympathy.

She looked up into his eyes.

"I am not so much afraid when you are with me, Carroll," she whispered softly.

"Then you are not afraid to be with me always?" he asked, with a boyish effort.

"Not afraid," she whispered confidently.

They moved slowly along the path, his arm about her. Less and less frequently, as they departed from the place of their meeting, they looked mysteriously back, to make sure that they were alone. It was not long, however, before they were again absorbed in each other, and for the moment were lost in the nothings of love, which to them meant all.

"Then you will marry me?" asked

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Carroll, as they both looked out on the river, "and come to my home in Baltimore?"

"I will marry you at the proper time and age and place, dear Carroll."

"And what is the proper age and time and place, dear Marjary?"

"I thought perhaps you'd know," she answered bashfully.

"I do. It's now—at once!" he cried in ecstasy. Again he took her in his arms and kissed her with youthful fervor, and she did not try very hard to stop him—only pretended to try. "It will be such fun," he continued passionately. "We'll run away, and come back and tell them all about it."

Marjary had dreamt of this; but now that the opportunity was really here she hesitated. Indeed, it is ever the feminine part to demur. There was so much to be thought of. There were so many things that must be done to perfect the romance of such an act. It must be done properly or not at all.

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"Run away!" she pouted, as if the thought had never occurred to her. "Elope! Impossible! We have no horse, Carroll, dear."

"And why a horse?" he demanded in surprise, for he thought of nothing and saw nothing but Marjary—always Marjary!

"We could not elope without a horse; none of my family ever did."

Carroll laughed, despite himself, just a little. Marjary, however, did not approve of his treating her objection so lightly. It was a serious matter, she was sure.

"But where would I get a horse this hour of night, Marjary?" It seemed to him absurd.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall we do?" she cried tearfully. "It's no use to reason with you. It would be no elopement at all. It would ruin my family reputation. Grandmamma eloped on a pillion behind grandpapa. They had a banquet, a duel—swords! I often heard

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my mother tell of it before I was born—I mean before she died. Grandpapa came into the ballroom like a hero in a book, took grandmamma from the arms of his rival, whom he wounded with his sword, and away they went in the moonlight at a gallop! Oh, I have a family with a skeleton in its closet, Carroll, dear!”

She was so very serious and proud of the family achievements that Carroll did not dare to laugh again. Indeed, he himself began to grow thoughtful, then sad, as he realized the enormity of their difficulty.

“And your dear mother, Marjary,” he finally asked tenderly, “did she elope, too?”

“To be sure she did,” replied Marjary, stamping her foot impatiently, for she could not understand how Carroll could be so stupid. “All my family! Mamma eloped with a coach and four.”

“A coach and four!” exclaimed the youth, in despair. “That was royal!”

“And my great-grandmamma had a horse, too!” continued Marjary, with a grand air that made Carroll fearful for his future. “No one ever heard of eloping in any other way.”

There was an awkward silence for a few moments. Marjary’s little foot tapped the sod impatiently as she sat there on the rock, looking out toward the water. Carroll’s mind contemplated anxiously the great seriousness of his situation with a sweetheart who came from a family who always eloped. There was surely more in matrimony than he had ever dreamed about. A wave of despair crept over him. He placed his hands over his eyes to reflect upon his great calamity.

Soon Marjary’s head re-nestled on his shoulder with the tenderness of constancy.

“Only—you mustn’t tell, Carroll,” she whispered, somewhat consoled, “for we only speak of it in the immediate family circle—great-grandmamma eloped with

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the butcher's boy; he borrowed the butcher's horse, and he didn't tell the butcher."

"Didn't anyone ever elope on foot, Marjary, dear?" Carroll asked, still so anxious for the outcome that he was not awake to the humor of her words.

"Not that I ever heard of," replied Marjary, sitting erect and racking her little brain for precedents. "It would be so foolish to elope that way."

"Then, if we can't do any better," stammered Carroll hopefully, "perhaps we might be foolish—just this once?"

"Perhaps," came softly from Marjary's sweet lips to the accompaniment of a confiding sob, after which she allowed herself to languish again complacently in his arms.

It was truly cruel to interrupt this scene, but good Parson Prime, quite innocently—the frock is always privileged to innocence—at this very moment closed the gate of Miss Honeygood's neighbor-

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ing cottage and came hastily up the path on his way homeward.

He was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he would not have observed the lovers, in all probability, had not Marjary uttered a little scream and sprang to her feet suddenly, followed by Carroll, seeking the cause of her fear.

"Oh, dear, it's Parson Prime!" she whispered, with agitation.

"What is it, friends?" inquired the parson, in a benign voice, coming quickly to a standstill at about "Thirdly" in what was to become next Sunday's sermon. It was too bad to interrupt him at such an early stage in his discourse, but Marjary and Carroll were innocent of any knowledge of his mental meanderings. "You surely are not afraid of me," he added comfortingly.

"We—we were only—" began Carroll, none too fluently.

"Yes—we were only— Why, Parson Prime!" cried Marjary.

"Why, Marjary, is it you?" exclaimed

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the parson, in astonishment, remembering that he had last seen her in the parlor of his new parishioner not very long before. "What brings you here? Is some one ill at home? Your cousin?"

He approached the startled lovers to discern their trouble.

"No, Parson Prime," stammered Marjary in reply.

"Some poor soul requires my prayers?" again inquired the parson solicitously.

"Not your prayers, parson," she replied, still more confused.

"What is it, child?" he asked impatiently. "What has happened?"

Marjary dropped her eyes.

"Ask Carroll."

Carroll dropped his eyes.

"Ask Marjary."

The man in the moon laughed.

The parson must have heard him.

"Oh, ho, I see!" exclaimed the good man gleefully. "But have you contemplated the seriousness of your step, my

children? Have you fully weighed its gravities?"

"Oh, yes, all its gravities, parson." Marjary spoke with great assurance on this point.

"And what says the dear Cousin Helen?" questioned the parson, with a good-humored smile.

"Well, we—haven't had time to ask her," admitted Marjary, somewhat awkwardly.

"No time to ask her?" demanded the parson, in surprise.

"No, Parson Prime," stammered the young girl; "you see—I—only just made up my mind."

Carroll came to her rescue—tardily:

"Yes, parson, she only just made up her mind. I made up my mind years ago."

The parson stood for a moment contemplating the young lovers ruefully. They dropped their eyes and tried to lean against each other for support. The moment was a great one in their lives, and

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one that they were not quite prepared to meet confidently.

"When would you have the ceremony performed?" asked Parson Prime thoughtfully.

"Is it necessary to put it off, parson?" murmured Marjary woefully.

"Yes—is it necessary to put it off, parson?" chimed in the more ardent Carroll. "To-night? Why not to-night, Marjary?"

"To-night!" exclaimed the parson, his astonishment increasing.

"It is nearly to-morrow already, parson," suggested the young penitent who would surely sin again.

The parson shook his head. For the first time he was very firm.

"Nay, nay, my children," he said. "There is a time and place for all good things. Back to your homes. The moon-lit lanes and secret walks are only places in which to whisper love. Let your happy thoughts be runaways; your eager hearts elope in joyous expectation; but

wed with proclamation bells and witnesses, that all may see the happiness and sanctity of the marriage scene and read in another love-ruled home another omen of a peaceful, prosperous state. Tomorrow we shall catechise your hearts; if they are true and things are fitting, far be it from me to say you nay."

Carroll and Marjary could wait no longer. They fell into each other's arms in a joyous embrace.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the parson reprovingly. "You are not wedded yet. Home, home; reflect and pray."

Carroll and Marjary dropped their heads penitently.

"Good night, Parson Prime," she stammered bashfully, realizing for the first time the indecorum of their enthusiasm when there were now upon them eyes more mortal than Luna's.

"Good night, Parson Prime," repeated Carroll, his voice trembling with emotion, for at this stage of the romance his sweetheart seemed the braver.

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“Good night, my children,” replied the parson kindly. “Heaven bless you both and make you wiser.”

They started down the path eagerly, glad of any avenue of escape.

The parson thought he saw them through the moonlight in each other's arms at the turn of the road, but his eyes were dim, and perhaps he was mistaken. He gave them the benefit of the doubt, though he shook his gray head dubiously, as he realized that old hearts can ill sit in judgment on young hearts' follies or the evening judge the morning of the day.

The clock in a distant steeple struck the witching hour.

He was startled. By a strange coincidence, which had not come home to him till then, that very hour, just forty years before, his own heart had been gladdened by a softly spoken vow still sweet to memory.

He started hastily to overtake his young friends and to make their hearts

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more happy by a stronger assurance that the morrow should witness their nuptials, if he could consummate it.

Lovers, when out of sight, do not walk fast, and the parson soon overtook them.

CHAPTER XVII

Virginia

IT was a marvelous night!

The breezes had borne the clouds away.

The sky rained stars. Artemis darted her streams of silvery light in shafts till lost in heavenly ether.

Edgar Poe, in communion with his spirit-love, wandered through the trees, now in the light and now in the shadow. His step was not listless, for he moved with purpose. His face was very pale, and his black cloak and dark, disordered hair gave him the majestic appearance of Hamlet, the Dane, thought-weary of life.

He turned into the path through the woods which led to Virginia's lonely grave.

He wondered what the day in night

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portended, but Mother Nature made him no answer. He wondered if it was to light him on his way. In despair, he cried out against the twinkling orbs above and the cinder of a moon, for he had found this quiet path when Nature's shroud of snow mantled the earth; he had found it when the darkness gathered and the midnight storm uprooted trees and made the people tremble; and he did not need their rays to point his path this night.

With the reverence of sorrowing love he approached the simple grave, always restful and quiet.

"Ah, here lies all the earth—the Lenore of my brain, the Virginia of my heart!"

He knelt by his sleeping one.

Satyrs and nymphs, dryads and elves, seemed to gather among the trees and bow respectfully with their poet in his great sorrow.

Silence reigned, but Poe needed no audience more inspiring than the night.

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“Where art thou, child?” he asked at last in a voice of anguish. “Come, speak to me.” He wondered if the coverlet of flowers could weigh her down and hide her face, or their sweet odor drug her for a gentle dream? He remonstrated with himself for his idle thoughts, and rose bitterly in self-reproach.

“Awake!” he cried in mental anguish, for he felt that he had naught but idle words to cast upon the grave of her he loved. Why had he come to this silent spot? To join her, pretty one. A rushing sound swayed the trees above his head. He thought it was a voice, and drew his cloak about him fearfully. It was the wind, self-weary, like himself. He chided himself for being a fool, a coward, fancy’s slave! Virginia had not feared to go, and she had naught but simple faith to guide her steps. He was armed with philosophy, worlds of philosophy, and yet he paused and shuddered as the night closed in about him.

What was it that arose unbidden to his

lips? A prayer his mother had taught him. Why came it at such a time and place out of the shadowy past? That baby prayer must be the *avant-courier* of his wretched soul, and bear the tidings of his coming to Virginia.

He knelt again above the grave in silent prayer—alone with his dead and his God.

His thoughts were broken in upon by the voice of Parson Prime.

“Has the day of judgment come, and these the first to answer to their names?” Poe asked himself wearily.

The parson and the two young lovers were hastening along the path, which ran not far from the spot where he sought communion with Virginia’s spirit.

“Whence came that voice?” inquired the good man curiously of those who followed him. “’Tis Sorrow’s own!”

They stayed their steps and listened. The leaves rustled in the night breeze.

“Who and what are ye that invade this sacred place?” The poet’s voice

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seemed to come from the grave itself, as he stood, wrapped in Melancholy, confronting those who intruded upon his reverie.

"Friends," answered the parson sympathetically, "who, mortal-like, have missed their path, but still have faith the eye of God is on them."

"Where are we, sir?" Carroll falteringly inquired.

"In the graveyard, sir," Poe answered.

"Can you not see?"

"What do you here, at such an hour?" inquired the parson respectfully.

"The better part of me dwells here," was the bitter answer. "God gives the earth to such as these and takes Virginia."

The parson turned to Marjary to reassure her. "He is some deranged man," he whispered, but he was loath to leave, and turned again to the man with the great sorrow.

"Fear not, friend," he said.

"Fear!" cried the poet. "My soul is seamed and scarred. I have writhed

in the toils of every fanged and hissing monster that feeds upon the weary brain, and you talk to me of fear!"

The noble bearing of the gentleman by the grave commanded respect and reverence.

"Life has made you bitter," said the parson, slowly shaking his old head. "It grieves me to leave you so unreconciled; but we intrude. Poor soul!"

The parson and the hopeful lovers went their way silently. There was something, however, about the stranger there by the lonely grave in the woods so late at night that touched their hearts with pity. His image haunted them. He seemed familiar even to Marjary and Carroll, though his features were half cloaked by Melancholy and the night. It was not till the day had dawned that they realized who he was, and where they had met him.

"How little sometimes stays the ship in port," murmured the poet, as he saw them pass into the shadows. It was grow-

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ing late, and here he still lingered on life's bleak shore alone, and listened to the mocking winds wafted from the great and unknown deep. He felt that he must slip the anchor, and take to the open sea or be mangled on the reefs, that there was no alternative. He moved toward an open grave. There lay the sexton's spade and pick and knife. He shuddered as he looked at them. Even Heaven had sent a toy of destruction to spur on tardy purpose. The gravedigger had surely forgotten the best thing in life, the means of leaving it. He tossed the knife aside that it might help some poorer beggar o'er the stile. He would have welcomed it had he not been better armed.

He drew a vial of poison from his pocket—the last friend of whom Edgar Poe would ask a favor!

The city lights across the Dyckman Bridge twinkled and gayly danced in the distance beyond the river. The poet stepped upon the rocks and took a long

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and lingering look; then he broke into a mocking laugh.

It was his farewell to the selfish, sleeping world! His words echoed against the cliffs beyond. He only laughed back at them—and they again replied in kind. He had no tears for the world at parting. It would continue to rob, murder, and satiate its greed for gold when he was gone. It would still hew down the forests; seine the seas of every pearl; kill the last warbling bird and living thing; pillage the hidden vaults of Mother Earth: then wrangle for its ill-gotten gains!

There was more than mockery of mankind in his hysterical laugh; there was almost hilarity in his tones as he addressed his farewell thoughts to the scenes of happier days.

“Thou art right!” he cried. “Let nothing live!” In his hopelessness he felt that there could be little chance for purity in a world which had translated Beauty into Filth, made Art a Wanton,

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laughed at Truth, and broken Justice's image, Heaven's best gift to man. He laughed again as he invited the World to this sweet secluded spot beneath the trees, to the neglected grave of Edgar Poe, a hapless poet, for he felt that he had found what it had not, the mystery of peace. He bade it read in the daisies that would grow over him of one who, weary of life's shadows, was cradled to eternal rest in the arms of Virginia—his Lenore.

He walked slowly back to the grave where she lay dreaming of his coming, and stood there looking down at the cold slab, lost in a thousand conflicting memories. He had lived such a little while, and yet he had lived so long.

The moon mist enveloped him as with a halo.

Slowly his hand raised the vial. A moonbeam danced upon a tear that fell upon her grave.

"Farewell, O World, farewell!" he cried, with the joyousness of one who is

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about to be made free. "I drink my last sweet draught to thee!"

He placed the vial to his lips. He raised his eyes——

There, in the moonlight, stood Helen, dressed all in white—the reincarnation of the form and features that rested in the grave beneath his feet.

"Virginia!" he whispered. "Virginia!" he cried.

The vial dropped from his lips, and he fell upon the grave unconscious.

CHAPTER XVIII

*Helen—My Helen—The Helen of a
Thousand Dreams!*

THE strange spell of night played upon the soul of Edgar Poe, and he, like many lesser men, was enchained in the cobwebs of the moon. The delicate fabric of his weird fancy extended to myriad stars, and was drawn back to Mother Earth by ghostly thoughts that led him to the flat slab marking Virginia's resting place among the trees at Fordham.

He had suffered, he had struggled, he had cried out, but there was no escape for him. The moonbeams seemed to laugh by night, the sun's rays dance by day.

"Helen—my Helen—the Helen of a thousand dreams!" he cried. The only echo which answered his beating heart was the one word: "Virginia!" "Le-

nore," he wailed. Still the answer was—"Virginia!"

Thus, the gods had spoken, and he knelt to them. He prayed, he pleaded for mercy. In memory and in anguish, he wandered the paths where Virginia and he had walked so often; he climbed to the bowlders that overlooked the river by the Dyckman Bridge, over which he, oh, so many times, had tramped to the city to sell his verse for her, and where he had sat for hours, hatless and distraught, his pencil conveying on bits of paper the vivid images of his brain.

What did it all mean? What could it all mean? Virginia had gone, and the branches of the old cherry tree by the window, where she was wont to sit, drooped in seeming sorrow.

Yes, she of his heart was gone forever. Yet, was she gone? The meeting with Helen flashed before him in the night light. He looked into Virginia's glorious, lovelit eyes. Were they Helen's? Were they Virginia's? No. Those

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lighter eyes had come to him even at the grave, and they had never gone. Helen's eyes! and he had found peace and comfort in her deep sympathy and restfulness in her tender voice. Where was his oath? No, no, this was not love, it could not be. He screamed it to the night. Still, those lighter eyes remained, and slowly his thoughts softened. She had been sent by Heaven in the form and beauty of his lost love. She was not Helen, she was his very own, his soul love in new garb of earth. Finally, he convinced himself. The soul was Virginia's; the eyes were Helen's. There could be no mistake. What was there in a name?

All rested in the footsteps homeward turned, the kiss of greeting, the eyes at meeting. These, since the world began, had gone forth in twos and not in threes.

She of the lovely eyes had met him in the moon's pale light, and there had brought him life again. Yet, death was what he sought, and she had given it

to him, but it was the death in life, so sought by all who know—the peace in life, which is the sweet forerunner of the peace in death. Helen, radiant and poetic, had enticed him to her home, and he had found it rich and warm and restful. Her finger tips had straightened out his fretful curls. They had cooled the fever of his brain, and had enchained his gaze with hers. He had read the poets with her, and she had read sweet verse to him. He had closed his eyes and listened to—Virginia's voice; he had opened them again, and looked upon—fair Helen's face. Was it a mockery of the gods? Perhaps. Yet he believed, accepted, and was grateful. Then he closed his eyes and slept, her warm kiss upon his lips.

Days, weeks, months rushed on like magic. Life and love danced and glowed about him in happy reflections.

Night after night he dragged his weary body to a spot near Helen's home, and saw the light in her window pass to its

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rest. It went out like the light in Virginia's eyes, but there were no tears in Edgar Poe's eyes now. He laughed back gayly, joyously, kindly. Another night, and still another, and she would relight the lamp, as sweet Heaven had rekindled in her eyes the dead embers that were in Virginia's.

But the poet did not suffer or feel or hope alone. Heaven had not so guided love. His fiery soul sent forth messages on the wings of thought, and in like manner they were received. He needed her she knew, and she was willing to give her all to him, but he must speak. Still, she would search the landscape far and wide from her gabled window, with restless, eager eyes — eyes that answered all! Yet, she must wait for him to speak. She must know from him in words. Nothing but words would satisfy her.

Sometimes Poe came to her, as if in response to her beckoning thought, and she felt sure her heart had brought him. Sometimes, in despair of his coming,

she would concentrate her heart's wish, and he would come to her. But often he was away, she knew not where, and then life grew black and terrible, and horrible thoughts crowded her longing brain. Her fancy would then see him alone—deserted by the world—in a garret—dying, and she not there to defend him against death. She not there, if vanquished, to receive his dying words—“Helen! My Helen!” She must, she would go to him. Then she would shudder with the fear of uncertainty. The breath of a passing spirit would rush through the room like a chilly wind, and whisper “Virginia—not Helen.” She would sink upon her couch in fear and dread, for were not his poems and stories all dreams of Virginia?

Then, in her most despondent moment, a light laugh, a soft step, and Edgar—her Edgar—was in her arms, and with a kiss awakened her to happiness. All was joy once more! It was so natural, so necessary to be together, it would then

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seem to both, and, like daydreams, the hours would drift by; but the day following, when she watched the long stretch of fields for his coming, while she waited for his roguish, boyish laugh and quick embrace—he would come, but there would be a storm cloud on his brow, wrath in his eyes—the trembling lip, the pallor—oh, the pallor of a Greek marble upon his brow and cheek, which bespoke manly beauty, and also death. Passionate and fearful, she would seize upon him, as if to keep him from the gods—all—all for herself alone. And, so, she would comfort her love until the quiet of her great soul would bring peace and calm to his; the color would spread upon his cheek, and the terrors of his fancy, which had driven him mad, would creep silently away. He needed her, she knew he needed her; and she needed him. Thus, resting in silence, and fancy's terrors gone, he would chide her for want of love because she did not speak to him. She would make his fearfulness

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the greater because she could not speak—only kiss him tenderly and persuade him to rest, and be strong again.

In wonder he would look at her while his lips burned with words of love unspoken, for hers were silent.

Then he would go away, and she would be alone. For hours she would lay as in a trance. She loved him, that she knew, yet she would sink away under the awful anguish of the great love which they alone possessed—yet possessed not. They were so finely wrought in human sympathy and perfect understanding that they realized that human love was limited, it could not satisfy their craving souls, and yet divine love was far beyond them.

A great doubt crept upon her. She had thrown aside the world for his companionship, and what would the outcome be? Could she fail in some quality by which his girl love held him still? Would death give them the craved freedom of their love? What separated

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them? She cried out hopelessly, as she realized all this, and in the night silence he cried back.

Her eyes grew darker than ever Virginia's were, as she struggled up and drew from beneath her pillow "Eleonora," the written confession of Edgar Poe's heart and love. She read it eagerly, the color came and went in her cheeks, her heart beat fast and faster; but with hushed breath she read it to the end—and the end she read many times.

In Eleanora she divined the story of Virginia; and in Ermengarde's happiness she found foreshadowed a like Elysium for herself.

CHAPTER XIX

Dat Rent Done Split My Memory

IN the last days of September, 1849, there was great excitement in the city of Baltimore. A bitter contest for Members of Congress and of the House of Delegates of the State of Maryland had brought about questionable electioneering methods. The wily politicians of the day had been known to go so far even as to detain uncertain voters in what they politely called a "coop"—prison was too harsh a word to be personally agreeable in a politician's vocabulary—to drug them, and to vote them repeatedly from poll to poll.

It was on one of these September days, in the heat of the growing excitement, that Edgar Allan Poe, a fugitive from himself, landed almost penniless from one of the Norfolk steamers.

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He had seen Helen Whitman at her Fordham home just before his departure for the South. The interview had been strangely passionate on his part; strangely fearful on hers.

She had been besought by her friends to forsake the poet, whose advances, following their fateful meeting, had become almost fanatical in their earnestness; but she could not—for she loved him. She satisfied herself, however, with the belief that it was sympathetic interest only which led her to accept his love; but she had gone further—she had accepted his ring, unknown to her friends. Throughout their mad courtship rumors of Poe's indiscretions had been brought to her on all sides. They had made her indignant. She had apparently ignored them, though in truth they had made her ill. They had even prostrated her.

On the very night of the poet's departure for the South, which was unexpected by her, and not previously contemplated

even by himself, he had entered the drawing-room, where she lay convalescing, like a man bereft of his reason. He, too, had learned what the world was saying. Like *Hamlet*, telling the story of his heart to *Ophelia*, he had caught a glimpse of the meddlers behind the arras!

Kneeling close by the couch where she rested he pleaded wildly: "Tell me you love me."

She only looked up at him strangely with her beautiful eyes—the eyes of his departed love!

"Tell me that you love me, Helen," he demanded again fervently in a whisper.

"I love you," she replied weakly.

The breath of a ghost passed between them.

He looked at Helen long and ardently. Then he went to the door, seemingly without his eyes; for his eyes were riveted upon her. He stood for a moment uncertain; then turned and fled from her presence in agony.

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He had suddenly realized that in Helen's face and figure his feverish midnight fancy had found again the soul of Virginia, he had followed it in mad delirium, but it was not there. The spirit he longed for had flown, but was waiting his coming. He would go to her.

With this parting still haunting his dazed mind he stepped from the steamer in Baltimore.

To his astonishment, he was greeted by many who seemed to know him, and was soon the center of a merry group, who asked considerably about his health and prosperity, whence he had come, and whither he was going. He was surely among friends again, and all would soon be well. His spirits rose, and he sought relief and forgetfulness in the Bohemian companionship of those about him. They led him to a tavern in Pratt Street. Anything to keep from thinking!

"Colonel" Roscoe Pelham, unknown to the poet, was now a candidate for Congress, and it was his lieutenants who had

so honored Poe. The leader of this band of "good citizens" was one William Pidgeon, proprietor, with his wife, Mrs. Dolly Pidgeon, of a rare alley boarding house and the "deliverer" of many questionable votes.

While making his rounds, to get reports of "good work," Pelham had observed Poe. He did not make his presence known, however. From a corner, he pointed Poe out to Carroll Brent, his new secretary, and bade him follow the poet and report his dwelling place. There was no further expression of interest in the candidate's demeanor. His cold indifference, in fact, prevented Carroll from an expression of astonishment, as he recognized the man he had last seen at a grave near Fordham.

Carroll had grown astute since the responsibility of life had come upon him, and he had learned the cunning of few words. Indeed, he had grown visibly in more ways than one since the days he had found his fate in Fordham, and re-

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turned to Baltimore with his wife, Marjary.

Here he had secured employment in the "Pelham offices," which was an assurance of worldly prosperity in itself, at the request of his friend Miss Byrd, whose properties in Pelham's hands were of sufficient value to make the granting of such a favor more than advisable. There the young man had proved himself apt and resourceful, and had developed a remarkable degree of tact, three attributes which in all ages of the world's history have found a straight path to success of a kind.

When the campaign had opened, Pelham had made Brent his secretary; though he usually intrusted others of more doubtful integrity to carry out certain dubious instructions.

Marjary, it is true, had not quite reconciled herself to the breaking of the family record of elopements, but she had, however, settled down quite complacently to matrimonial existence and merged

her ambitions into the ambitions of " Mr. Brent."

Carroll referred to " his wife " and " his duties as secretary " to one of the leading political spirits of the time with a grand manner, highly approved, and becomingly " seconded " by his life's love.

Meanwhile, the poet sat sadly unconscious of the evil thoughts about him.

It is in such dark days that true friendship, if any, is found, and friendship is not always found in a white heart. So it happened in this case.

By happy chance, which is often omnipotent in the destiny of poets, as well as of lesser men, Erebus, returning late from a search for work along the wharves, happened by the very tavern in Pratt Street where the poet was being entertained, and through the window he recognized his former master, the center of a jovial set.

It was with joy unbounded that the negro entered the tavern, in spite of his

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trepidation, and greeted "Mars' Edgah," whom he had not seen since they parted at the grave of Virginia, and he had returned to Baltimore, at Poe's suggestion, to seek employment. The poet, too, was delighted, and fairly embraced the old slave, to the astonishment of those about him. He did not realize that the eyes, which followed his every movement, belonged to men instructed by "Colonel" Pelham to corral arrivals, and legally or otherwise utilize their franchise at the polls.

"I have no work," replied the negro, in answer to his former master's earnest inquiry.

"Nor have I," laughed Poe sardonically.

It was late, and the master had no place to rest his head. His money, too, was exhausted.

He followed Erebus from the gay scenes of the tavern, chatting with him with the familiarity of an old friend, and quite unconscious that he was being fol-

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lowed. Like other great men, he gratefully embraced the companionship of the lowly who brought back other days. Was not Erebus an old friend?

With many apologies, the negro led the master slowly to his own lodgings in a garret under the eaves near Lombard Street. He assisted him to climb the rambling stairs, which hung crablike to the outer walls of the frame structure. Even the entrance was uncanny.

The negro's abode consisted of two small rooms, probably for the reason that they were so united that they could not well be let separately; and, with the best that he had, he went joyfully to work to make his former master comfortable for the night in the larger one. He had saved a little for his rent out of what he had earned; but he "jes' forgot dat" and slipped out and bought a blanket for "Mars' Edgah."

The next day the poet went forth alone to seek, as he said, employment for his pen; and Erebus stayed behind with fear

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and trembling. His master, he felt, was not himself. He spent the day making the room as comfortable as he could with the small means at hand. Something told him that "Mars' Edgah" would come back.

Hour after hour, however, he stood at the window watching, and the evening approached without Poe's return.

It was Election Day, October 3d. The streets were still crowded with voters going to and from the polls, with processions, bands, and idlers. The city was taking a holiday, or might have called it such, for no work was being done.

Erebus filled the oaken bucket with water from a neighboring pump, and slowly climbed again to his musty garret. Under his heavy burden he talked to himself, after the fashion of his race:

"'Deed, I wish dis hyah water 'ud run up hill. Mars' Johnson used t' say dar was plenty ob sal'ratus in de cup and watah in de well. Dar's watah nuff in de well, but yo' has to climb fo' it, Erebus.

But, 'deed, dar ain' no sal'ratus in de cup. Dar ain't eben common salt."

He put the bucket on the table by the gable window, which looked out on Misery and church steeples, wharves, and spars of ships.

There was a sharp knock without. The warped door fell open, and Helen Whitman entered the room. Erebus was overcome by the wisdom of her face, as Tony had been in days gone by.

"Miss Virginiah!" he murmured and fell upon his knees, a prayer for mercy upon his lips.

Helen scarcely noticed his movement, for she, too, was overcome, not by the witchery of her resemblance to Poe's departed love, which had cast a spell upon the negro, but by the unpleasantness of his surroundings.

Her gown was of silk, shading wonderfully from gray into old rose and gold, and the full skirt hung in graceful folds over the hoops. She wore a long coat of gray with swansdown trimmings

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and a large muff of the same material. An old-rose poke bonnet with a high crown gave her face a look of pensive piquancy, and the feather of shadow gray softened the rigid style of the bonnet and added grace.

"Who are you?" at length she asked.

Erebus could only mutter: "Miss Virginia!"

"Virginia again!" cried Helen mechanically, for she was indifferent to anything now that did not directly tend to help the man she loved. She realized, at length, the horror her presence had brought to the black man's soul, and it touched her deeply. "No, my poor man, I am not Miss Virginia," she said reassuringly. "I wish I were."

Erebus did not move. His eyes stared, as if the gates of hell had been opened and his name had been called.

"Youse Miss Virginia on earth de secon' time," he cried, "sure as Erebus has eyes, else youse de spit image ob her."

"Does Mr. Poe live here?" demanded Helen. "I mean—come here— Answer me, and quickly!"

She was in no mood now for trifling. Her purpose was definite. Her character was severe, she had come to help the man she loved, and nothing should hinder her.

"Mars' Edgah done gone away, Missus," Erebus said.

"Don't tell me that," cried Helen, for this was as terrible to her as her resemblance to Virginia was to the black man before her. "That's what I hear each place I go. Shall I never find him?"

She turned to go.

"Where did you see him last, Missus?" cried Erebus pathetically.

Helen replied mechanically, her eyes upon the broken furniture, the musty walls, the cobwebby rafters, the soiled couch, the scattered manuscripts: "At Fordham."

"At Fordham!" cried Erebus. "And you don' follow Mars' Edgah all de way

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here to Balt'more, Missus? You must love him."

"Did he say where he was going or when he would return?" was all that she could reply.

"I asked him, Missus, but he only shook his head and said: 'God knows. God knows.'"

Helen went to the door whence she had entered and supported herself by holding to the latch. "When did he leave this—this place?" she asked.

"Dis mornin', Missus," replied Erebus.

"This morning— God knows! God knows!" she sobbed as she made her way down the spider stairs and into the blackness of the night.

Poor Erebus stood for some moments as in a trance. His brain moved slowly, his heart beat fast.

"How she did 'mind me of Miss Virginiah!" he muttered.

There was another knock, but this time it was from the door within that led to

the stairs below. Erebus sprang to his feet.

“Dat’s dat pollertician woman ’bout de rent,” he muttered sadly. “Po’ white trash! I wouldn’t dirty my han’s wid her, but I owes her money. I didn’t tell Mars’ Edgah ’bout dat. He ain’t right, nohow; ’deed he ain’t. Erebus, yo’ ol’ Marsa’s possessed.”

The door was opened without further formality, despite its rusty catch, which operated so badly that it was possessed of some of the virtues of a new lock. In walked, with an impatient flourish, Mrs. William Pidgeon, landlady and wife of Mr. William Pidgeon, politician. She could scarcely be said to walk in, however, but swayed in, rather, with her huge body and round, baby face and retroussé nose, which on some faces might have been a charm, but in her case did not fit. That was the only apparent difficulty with it. Her eyes were little twinkling buttons of envy and kindred womanly virtues.

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“Keep me waitin’, would you, in my own house?” she broke forth, with a Southern drawl. “Better pay your rent before you put on airs.”

Erebus looked at his landlady sheepishly.

“’Deed, Missus, dat rent done split my memory ’tirely,” he said, with a blank stare. “’Deed I’ll pay.”

“I reckon you will, or go into the street, you lazy good for nothin’,” she retorted, with a great deal of vigor in proportion to the time it took her to enunciate her words. “You’d keep this elegant apartment at your ease, would you, and Dolly Pidgeon in the tub from sun-up? Poor William, too, killin’ himself night and day ’lecting Major Pelham for Congress!”

She took possession of one of the rickety chairs, which went with the “apartment,” with the firmness of fleshy conviction, and scowled at her lodger. Erebus stood gracelessly in the corner of the room, endeavoring to gather together

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the scattered remnants of his thickly incrusting mind.

The pause was not for long.

"Who is this man you brought home with you without your landlady's asking?" drawled the irrepressible Dolly. "I haven't got a good look at him. But my William has."

"Dat's Mars' Edgah Allan Poe," responded the negro proudly.

"Your master!" exclaimed the dominant one. "You told me you were a free nigger."

"Mars' Edgah done freed me long years ago, Missus," replied Erebus, with a sickly grin.

"Wasn't worth your keepin', eh?" demanded the irate Mrs. Pidgeon, with a contemptuous sneer. "I thought so. What's all this litter?"

She arose and started for the manuscripts which were scattered on the floor and table, and visible especially in the poet's old hair trunk, which Erebus the night before had brought from the boat

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landing on his back, and which chanced to be open.

"Don' yo' touch dat, Missus," cried the faithful negro, in quick alarm; "don' yo' touch dat!"

Mrs. Pidgeon was none too brave where danger was involved, and she started back in affright with more activity than was her custom, or, apparently possible in response to the negro's wild demonstrations.

"Lord a' mercy! what is it, man?" She gathered up her skirts with as much anxiety as if her adversary had been a mouse.

"Dat's Mars' Edgah's writin's," stammered Erebus fearfully, still hovering over his master's possessions with a protective air.

"Drat the nigger!" cried the landlady, her confidence at once returning. "I thought it was gunpowder. Writings, eh?"

She pushed Erebus aside indignantly and went for the trunk. She had made

The Raven

up her mind to go to the bottom of things; and when Mrs. Pidgeon's mind was made up, even her husband found it wise not to interfere. She did not like the idea of having "pernicious writin's" under her roof. Such things had always sprung from an acquaintance with the Evil One. She knelt and looked over them contemptuously, tossing them about, to the horror of Erebus, with the air of one who was anything but pleased with their philosophical or poetic contents. She could make out the words here and there, but she intimated very forcefully that it took "sense" as well as "words" to make "writings," and that there was no sense to be found in these. Erebus was forced to look on hopelessly.

"What are dey 'bout, Missus?" he finally mustered courage to ask. "I can't read."

She glowered at him in blank amazement.

"I reckon not," she finally observed, with a superior sneer. "Pretty state of

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things if sech as you went 'round readin'."

"Please tell me, Missus," stammered the negro solicitously. "Does dey tell what's de matter wid Mars' Edgah?"

"Hear that ignorance!" laughed the landlady, throwing the manuscripts aside and climbing to her feet with an awkward lurch. "I'll show what's the matter with your master if he don't pay his rent better than you do. Why don't he sell his writings?"

"Dar ain' nobody wid brains nuff to buy 'em, Missus; dat's why," said Erebus firmly.

The hero of a small theater could not have taken the stage from the heroine more triumphantly in his reply than did Erebus; but his triumph was not for long. He was outnumbered by one and that one was formidable!

"Rubbish!" cried the proprietress, her face flushing with anger. "If my rent ain't paid by to-night, when my William gets home from 'lectin' Major Pelham to

The Raven

Congress, out you go—‘Mars’ Edgah Allan Poe,’ writings and all!” She looked at her lodger coldly, then, squaring her elbows, demanded in a business-like way: “Do you acquiesce in the notice to vacate?”

“Will dere be fo’ce used, Missus?” asked the negro woefully.

“Yes, there’ll be force used, and plenty of it,” replied the landlady, in very convincing accents.

“Den I acquiesces,” stammered Erebus thoughtfully.

There was loud cheering in the street below. Mrs. Pidgeon went to the window and leaned as far out as the proportions of the sill and of her person would permit, for the election was an important matter in her family. If Major Pelham had won, she knew that he would have to reward her William generously; for wasn’t it “her” William that was ’lecting him? She cheered the passers-by enthusiastically and seemed for the time being to be oblivious to her black lodg-

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er's unhappy outlook, if not the uncertainty attached to her rent money.

"Hurrah for William! Hurrah for Pelham!" she cried above the din.

Then she unceremoniously departed, deigning only to cast a contemptuous look at the "free nigger," as she called Erebus, and hobbled down the stairs to get a better view of the passing throng. She was rightfully afraid she might miss something.

Erebus fell into a chair with a heavy sigh and listened to her departing steps.

"I certain'y is glad t' see her go," he muttered, shaking his head. "I'se pow'ful weary ob dis life. Dis 'sponsibil'ty ob minglin' wid s'ciety's killin' me. I can cook fo' dem, open de do', an' black der shoes; but I can't do dis entertainin'. Fo' God, I'se becomin' de shadow ob my formah self."

He stood disconsolate at the window.

CHAPTER XX

How Far Is Home?

EREBUS waited until the shadows were creeping along the uncobbled streets and among the dingy houses and the neighboring wharves, where the ships' spars resembled swaying cobwebs against the sky. Then he went down the long stairs without slowly and on to the street, seeking anxiously for his master.

People came and people went—some hurrying home, some hurrying to the polls, some idling, some reeling under the influence of strong drink which they had taken to clear their brains, no doubt with a view to exercising properly their sovereign franchise at the American polls, where the populace reign.

The lights along the streets were being lighted one by one, and throwing more curious shadows even than the night into

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the irregular passageways, rooms, and alleys along Lombard and Pratt streets.

A crowd was gathering on the corner. It was a noisy and turbulent crowd. Erebus, his eyes still on the alert, joined the throng to see what it was all about, for he had an equal right to know.

In the center was a man with dark hair, here and there mingled with a knot of gray—a sign of sorrow, not of age. His face was pale as death, his black clothes torn, soiled, and rumped, and his hat was gone. He seemed not to know who he was or where he was, but looked around him with a wild stare at the mocking bystanders.

Erebus's heart sank within him as he recognized in the sad face and the long black coat, old and shiny with stains about the neck and shirt, "Mars' Edgah." He ran to him and put his arm about him and led him gently out of the jeering throng.

"Insolent street beggars!" muttered the poet in answer to their laughter.

The Raven

"This *is* Richmond! I reckon I know Richmond—every stone in Richmond."

He did not seem to know Erebus, though he suffered himself to be led like a child.

The crowd straggled after, mocking and sneering, for they had nothing better to do, and they knew not what they did. They followed even to the stairway which led to the little garret where the roofs and steeples were visible through the window under the slanting roof.

"They did not treat me so when I lived here," murmured the poet discordantly, with an uncertain, far-away stare as his faithful attendant helped him up the steep, wayward acclivity without. "They did not dare—the cowards! I was young then; but now I have lived an eternity. It cannot be far. How everything has changed! Courage! I am nearly home; I feel I am nearly home. Oh, I cannot stand! My head! Help! Help! I must get home."

He sank upon the rough board floor

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in the garret gently, Erebus still supporting him. The jeering and laughter of the crowd below in the street grew faint and distant. They had turned away in pursuit of other amusement.

Erebus lighted the candle on the table. It filled the room with dancing rays.

"Even the children and the dogs have forgotten me." The poet looked up mystified at the warped rafters.

Finally he asked faintly for Mr. Allan.

"Mars' Allan don' live yah, Marsa," was all the negro could say.

"Everyone in Richmond knows Mr. Allan," insisted the poet imperiously.

"Richmond! Dis am Balt'more, Marsa."

"He is just like the rest," sighed Poe.

Erebus wiped the tears from his big white eyes.

He placed a pillow under his master's head. He could not induce him to lie upon the couch.

"Thank you, boy," said Poe, not even yet seeming to realize who was with him.

The Raven

He closed his eyes again and seemed to doze. Erebus sat by him, watching faithfully.

There was a step on the stairs. Erebus opened the door gently, not to disturb "Mars' Edgah." He could have cried for joy. It was Tony!

"Erebus, you here!" cried the poet's friend, in astonishment, as he looked in at the forlorn doorway dubiously and recognized the negro. "It is true, then. They told me such a man entered here, hatless and haggard, perhaps dying."

"He is dar, Mars' Tony." Erebus's voice choked.

Tony ran to the sleeping form and lifted it lovingly in his arms. He was so affected at finding his lifelong friend that he, too, was scarcely able to speak. When at length he found his voice he bade Erebus run for help; then he as quickly countermanded the order: "No, here. We must get him to the hospital. That will be better."

Together they lifted the poet gently.

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He only stared at them with a wild, uncanny stare.

"Come, Edgar," pleaded Tony tenderly, taking him by the arm. "Come home with me. I am Tony. Don't you know Tony? You will be taken care of now, dear fellow."

"How far is home?" was Poe's questioning answer. He looked strangely, first at Tony and then at Erebus, and seemed to try to recollect.

"Not far, not far," answered his friend softly. "This way, Edgar, this way."

The poet started indifferently with Tony toward the door. Before he reached it, however, he broke away from him with an hysterical laugh and recrossed the room.

"You would deceive me again, would you?" he cried, in haughty defiance. "You would cage Edgar Allan Poe again! No, no, I have seen too many of your tricks. Come, boy, come." He placed his arm affectionately about Ere-

bus. Then, looking steadfastly at Tony with a stony stare: "Go your way, and I'll go mine. Teach me the way in Richmond! Teach me! Come, boy, come."

He moved slowly away from Tony, with a cunning, repellent expression upon his face, and seemed to call upon some imaginary boy friend he had perhaps known in his wanderings. Erebus looked appealingly at Tony for help.

"This is heart-rending!" Tony cried. "Edgar, I am Tony, your old friend, Tony."

The poet smiled faintly, but gave no sign of recognition.

"That is what they told me before," he murmured deliriously. "They were my old friends. They patted me on the back, and we toasted the old times, and drove in a cab, and I voted, and we laughed and sang, and they took me somewhere, and the door was bolted, and I could not get out— I do not remember."

He sank into a chair, seemingly obliv-

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ious to all about him. Erebus knelt beside him, one arm supporting his old master.

Tony bent over him lovingly.

"Edgar, listen to me," he cried pathetically.

The poet only drew the negro closer to him and gave his white friend a startled look.

"Boy, you are my only friend now," he said to Erebus. "The flowers are growing over all the rest. You shall share my old room with me, and shall be great some day. I will show you the way, boy—the way where I failed."

Tony turned away in anguish.

"Must I look on this, the bitter penalty of genius?"

He caught the negro's eye sympathetically. Color made no difference now. They both loved Edgar. He knelt by the poet's side again and begged him to look up at him.

Poe struggled to his feet and answered his friend's appeal austere-ly.

The Raven

“Away from me, sir! Must I call a servant to show you the door? I do not wish to do that. It would not be Southern hospitality. Be seated there, sir.”

He suavely motioned Tony to a broken chair. The poor fellow sank into it, scarcely knowing what he did. The poet shuddered.

“How cold it is,” he said, kneeling on the floor and looking about him vacantly. “The fire is nearly out. There are only ashes on the hearth. They did not expect me home. No one even met me. How small the old room looks to me now. It used to be so large when I was a boy. Nothing changed. The dear ones have held everything sacred just as I left it. See, boy, see! those pictures hanging there above the open fire are father and mother. You must know and love them, boy. And this, hanging just as I left it by the open window—that’s Virginia. I hung it there myself. How often, as the dawn stole through the lattice window, I have turned on my boyhood’s pillow,

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and in that languid half sleep when fleeting fancy gilds reality, that fairyland 'twixt dream and dream, my eyelids would slowly rise and disclose her smiling face, and I would kiss my hand to the picture, and sometimes the tears would trickle down my cheek."

The tears were trickling down Tony's cheeks.

"And I am home at last," murmured the poet again, rising and looking about the room. A heavenly light of happiness played over his face, which momentarily brought joy into his friends' hearts, white and black. For an instant a look of the old self came into the poet's eyes and he seemed to realize who was with him.

The light faded almost as quickly as it had come.

Tony supported him, and with a choking voice cried out sympathetically:

"Yes, yes, your old room, Edgar."

Erebus looked at Tony in surprise.

Tony answered his look:

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"We must humor him until he will go with us."

"Strange," continued the poet, slowly looking about and running his hands through his hair after a youthful fashion that clung to him still from the days of his Byron collar and Byron ways, "I cannot remember. Everything is confused here. Home, home, home!"

As he spoke, some negroes, passing in the street below, broke into a melody of the cotton fields, which gradually died in the distance. It startled him. It excited him, as music had ever done. His spirits seemed to revive. He ran to the window and cried out gayly, feverishly, but wildly still, in answer to their song:

"Do you hear, do you hear? The plantation song! It is nightfall and they are coming from the fields. When my hour comes, God grant my spirit may take its flight to the soft vibrations of a passing melody! They shall have a good supper for that song. But where is Virginia? Virginia! Ah, I forgot. Bid

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them saddle Phyllis. Here, Erebus, buckle on my spurs. Tony and I are to have a gallop by the river at moonrise. It is past the hour now. Quick, my cloak and gloves! I must not keep Tony waiting."

He sank upon the cot, and Erebus and Tony went to him. In answer to their appeals he only bade them, with a blank stare, to call Virginia.

"Would I could," sighed Tony sadly.

"Boy," cried Poe imperiously, "go call Virginia!"

"I would not know her now, Marsa," stammered the negro, not knowing what to say.

"Would you not know an angel?" demanded Poe bitterly.

"Come, I will show you the way," cried Tony, leading the heartbroken negro to the door.

He bade him in a whisper to run for a carriage. Erebus understood, and was gone in an instant.

"How fragrant are the jasmine flow-

The Raven

ers!" whispered the poet, looking toward the window, whence came the cool, refreshing breeze that precedes a storm, calling his old slave by name, though he was no longer present. "They are all in bloom to welcome me. They must join you in the chorus, Erebus. It is sweeter that way."

Tony returned quietly and knelt by the cot where the poet sat, and looked deeply into his eyes, long and earnestly.

"Edgar! Edgar!" he cried at last, in despair. "Don't you remember me? Try, try!"

The light of intelligence seemed to come again into the poet's classic features. Tony's heart rose responsively with joy.

Then it was gone again.

Then it came again.

"Tony! Tony! Tony!" he at last whispered softly.

Tony could not speak. He took the poet in his arms and thanked God with all his heart; his love had conquered.

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"We have been friends a long, long time, Tony," sighed Poe abstractedly; "but where is Virginia? Strange she does not come, the little truant!"

"You will see her very soon, very soon," said Tony in a choking voice. He lifted the poet gently to his feet and moved slowly toward the door.

"Ah, I forgot, the signal—the signal!" cried the poet wildly. He sank back upon the cot, despite Tony's efforts to support him, with a sigh of exhaustion. "Where is the window, Tony? My eyes are dim yet." He tried to rise, then fell back again, exhausted.

"What is it, Edgar?"

"My kerchief—wave it, wave it!" was the only answer.

"If it will give you any happiness——"

Tony took the proffered handkerchief, and, glancing toward the door for Erebus, ran to the window.

"There, there, the other window, Tony," cried the poet, again delirious.

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“Higher; she cannot see you. She is watching and waiting, I know. She will meet me at the crossroads; then we will stroll together through the woods, and I will pick the wild flowers for her; and the violets will tell her of my love. She comes, she comes!”

He rose, as in a dream of ecstasy, and struggled toward the window where Tony stood. Though he was momentarily strong in his delirium, his strength seemed to come and go with his moods and thoughts.

“See, Tony,” he said, entranced, “as beautiful as the Dawn! Virginia! Virginia! Virginia! Where have you been, Virginia? I thought you would never come.” He paused and looked about hopelessly. “No, no; not my Virginia, not my Lenore. I am deceived again. It is the other face—the other face!” He shuddered and grew paler, as if fear had taken hold of him.

“Oh, if Helen were only here now!” cried Tony, in despair.

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The sound of the poetess's name seemed to affect Poe as nothing before had done. He shuddered again and drew away from his friend with a mysterious, startled look. He motioned Tony imperiously to silence.

"Don't speak her name again, if you love me, Tony," he cried, in such pathetic accents that they went straight home to Tony's heart.

"But she is here in Baltimore with Marjary and Carroll!" Tony pleaded earnestly. "She seeks everywhere for you."

The poet shook his head in reply.

"Edgar!" continued his friend more earnestly. "She will help you, as she has helped you for months, by her companionship and love. I have seen it. You have been like one inspired with new life since you met that night."

"That night!" murmured the poet sadly. "I know—I know——"

"Rumor whispers that you are engaged to wed," Tony went on, in a plead-

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ing voice; "that happiness and health await you in her love. Your friends rejoice——"

"Rumor always knows." There was a tinge of bitter sarcasm now in Poe's voice as his lip curled in answer.

Tony embraced his friend more tenderly, to quiet him.

"Come with me to Helen, Edgar, to Marjary's. Do not let her find you here in such surroundings——"

The poet drew himself to his full height and steadied himself with difficulty.

"It is my home, sir," he answered.

"There, there," pleaded Tony. "We know; come with me. She will nurse you back to life and love. Why did you leave her in the hour of your happiness? It was cruel."

He tried again to lead his friend toward the door, but Poe broke away impatiently.

"I cannot talk of this, Tony, even to you," he said firmly. "I shall never see

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Helen Whitman again. Never! It is best, best— Believe me, it is best.”

Before Tony realized it the poet had disappeared into Erebus’s adjoining room and closed the door after him. Tony was alone in the garret.

Erebus entered softly.

“ Mars’ Tony, de carriage! ”

Tony came to himself with a start.

“ Yes, yes. He is there. Look after him. Let no one see him until I return with the doctor. He would not go with us. I have had many dark days, but none so black as this.”

He pressed the negro’s hand firmly and went down the stairs to the carriage.

CHAPTER XXI

It Seems Like Retribution

"MUCH as a man's life is worth to climb such stairs," muttered Pelham as he entered the garret, up the crooked interior stairway which was Dolly's prerogative, and glanced about curiously. He turned to William Pidgeon, who was close at his heels, followed also by his secretary, Carroll Brent, and questioned them closely about the room.

"This is the place, gov'nor," replied Pidgeon knowingly.

The three glanced about and spoke in an undertone for some minutes.

The door of the little adjoining room, where Poe had gone, softly opened and—the negro appeared. He started when he observed the three stalwart visitors, two of whom he recognized, with any-

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thing but pleasure. Pelham was the first to see him.

"Where is Mr. Poe?" he demanded sharply, struggling still to regain his breath.

The negro was not to be easily caught, however. He remembered the parting injunction placed upon him by Tony to let no one see his master.

"Who say 'Mars' Poe' live yah, sah?" he demanded in a frightened tone, moving nervously in front of the door, which he had closed behind him.

"I do," exclaimed the irascible Pidgeon, to show his authority over his black tenant and also to reveal his ardor for his party leader, "and I ought to know the lodgers in my own house."

"'Deed, Mars' Pelham—" stammered the negro.

"You know me?" inquired the congressional candidate, looking up in surprise.

"Yes, Marsa," continued the negro, more confidently. "Don' yo' know me,

sah? I'se Mr. Erebus." There was considerable pride in his manner as he pronounced the name which his master had given him years before.

The name did not, however, seem to make a deep impression upon the "great" leader, who had quite forgotten the black man, though the incident of his purchase might have been recalled forcefully to his recollection. It would have been quite different, no doubt, if Erebus had been a voter, for then the politician would have struggled nobly to demonstrate how dearly he had held Erebus's name in memory. As it was, Pelham only sneered and said absent-mindedly: "Mr. Erebus of Hades?"

"No, sah," explained the negro proudly; "Mr. Erebus of Richmon', sah."

Pelham did not deign to notice the explanation, if he heard it, but turned to his gallant supporter and asked if this was the only room? He was told that it was Poe's and that the "nigger" slept in the adjoining one under the eaves.

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"Yes, Marsa," stammered Erebus, excited at the trend the conversation was taking, and guarding the door whence he had entered as best he could; "we—I—has two rooms, excusin' de parlor downstairs."

His anxiety to explain everything was received with a sharp order from Pelham to "be still," which was followed quickly by a less diplomatic command from his lieutenant to "get out."

Erebus obeyed both injunctions very gladly. He returned straightway to his sleeping master, not forgetting to bolt the door behind him that gave access to the poet. There he sat in the dim light, firmly resolved to hold the citadel against all comers until Mars' Tony should return.

Pelham threw himself impatiently into a chair by the table and remained thoughtful for some moments. His lieutenants stood near him, awaiting orders.

There was a noise in the street below, and Carroll went to the gabled window

and peered out into the stormy night. Pelham motioned Pidgeon close to him.

"What did you say they did with him?" he asked earnestly. "Tell me again."

"Nineteen of them—drugged," whispered the lieutenant proudly, glancing over his shoulder to make sure that Carroll was out of earshot; "voted in every ward——"

"Yes, yes," whispered Pelham impatiently; "but where did he go? After—after——"

"Turned him loose with the rest," exclaimed Pidgeon knowingly, "about done for—thanks to your friends."

The insinuation in the lieutenant's voice was not received gratefully by his candidate.

"Don't say that," Pelham commanded with a conscience-stricken expression.

"I won't say it aloud, gov'nor," Pidgeon hastened to add, by way of amendment; for he had an eye always on the weathercock for favorable winds.

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"Voted eleven times. He'll never peach. On his last legs when we got him."

Pelham rose slowly to his feet. He was thinking, and it was evident that his thoughts were not agreeable companions. He leaned on the table, and his eyes roved about the room; then they rested on Pidgeon. He buttonholed his lieutenant again closely.

"If he dies, it was not through my orders," he whispered almost inaudibly, turning very pale as he spoke. "Do you understand? It was not through my orders. By Heaven, I knew nothing of it!"

It was evident from the man's expression that he was to be pitied. Whatever had happened to the poet he had not commanded it, but his men perhaps had executed it. While he could evade the judgments of this world, he did not know what the next might have in store for him, if Fate should bring about the undoing of the rival of his youth by means of powers set to work by his hands.

Pidgeon servilely acquiesced.

"It only happened to torment me," continued Pelham fretfully. "Here, get a drink for yourself while I wait to see—to see—if he comes."

Pelham's pallor deepened with his thoughts. He offered his worldly lieutenant a small roll of bills. Pidgeon looked at it with a very displeased countenance, but he did not fail to take it, small as it was.

"This won't satisfy my constituents, gov'nor," he said, meekly sliding the money out of harm's way into his pocket. "You know, Dolly's downstairs waitin' for me."

"I got you both work at the hospital," replied Pelham impatiently. "What more do you want?"

"Well, you see as how I promised Dolly a little somethin' on the 'lection," continued the wonderful Pidgeon, with a sycophantic grin. "It don't pay for a man to lie to his wife, gov'nor. Wimmen remembers too long."

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The conversation was interrupted by another wild cheering in the street. Cheers mean much to a politician who has his ear to the ground, and Pelham had his ear very close to the ground. The cheering, interspersed with an ominous rumbling from the heavens, extended to the neighborhood of the polls, and interrupted even the candidate's reflections. Above the noise arose the shrill notes of boys calling out the evening papers. The little party in the garret listened intently to catch the words; for they were of great moment to them.

"Papah! Even' papah!" arose above the din. "Full 'count of Major Pelham's defeat for Congress!"

"My God! That, too!" murmured Pelham, as he realized the full import of the news.

Carroll ran to his employer sympathetically. The candidate dropped again into his chair by the table dazed.

"Did you hear, gov'nor? The election has gone against us."

"It all seems like retribution," was the only audible reply.

Pidgeon swaggered over to his leader with a hangdog expression.

"We are beat," he drawled between his teeth, after a moment's silence. "I say, we are beat." His employer did not deign to answer. "Well, what do I get out of it?" sneered Pidgeon, with bad grace.

"What do you expect, fool?" snapped Pelham, rising and walking impatiently up and down the room. "We are beaten, and there is an end of it."

Carroll returned to the balcony to catch the mutterings below.

"You didn't say that way yesterday, gov'nor," replied Pidgeon, with an effort to restrain his temper. "You said as how William Pidgeon was the greatest pollertician vote-catcher in the business, and as how there was rewards."

"That was yesterday," replied the defeated candidate, none too patiently. "You are one day behind the times."

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His tone was anything but soothing to his low-born but crafty lieutenant.

"You can't crawl that way, gov'nor," answered Pidgeon, biting his lip.

It looked as if the "party" were to have a split of leaders there and then, irrespective of the *locus*. Many fateful events in politics have hung upon a more trivial matter and been enacted in a less prepossessing abode. Fate, however, intervened, again in the form of a wild cheering from the populace without. The three went to the window for a confirmation of the news. Tar barrels had been placed in the street, and the blaze therefrom flickered through the blackness of the night even to the poet's garret like the writing on the walls at the feast of Belshazzar.

"What's that fire down the street; something is burning?" demanded Pelham irritably.

"It looks like you in effigy, gov'nor," suggested Carroll sorrowfully.

"I reckon the people want you to get

used to fire," sneered the ungrateful Pidgeon.

"Damn the people!" muttered the "great" leader with the usual contempt of a politician for the populace when they have had the audacity to vote contrary to his desires. "I can't wait here any longer. I am not well——"

He was about to take his departure. He had grown to look a broken man in the last few moments. The realization of his defeat told heavily on him. Carroll looked at his employer sympathetically; but Pidgeon only considered the result from a personal viewpoint.

"See here, gov'nor," he broke forth as the candidate approached the door to the stairway below. "I am not as young as I look; you know I works politics by the job, win or lose."

"I tell you, if there is nothing for me, there is nothing for you."

The candidate's words were austere; but Pidgeon was not abashed. He caught the coat sleeve of his leader with

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sufficient force to bring him to a standstill.

"I reckon there is, though," he said, dropping his voice so that Carroll could not hear. "How about my lodger and the 'coop' that you didn't know about, but your friends did?"

Pelham turned white with rage.

"Silence, sir!" he broke forth in great bitterness. "I will allow no one to reflect upon my innocence in that matter, sir."

Pidgeon slunk away from him. He was a coward with his superiors, but of the bravest with his inferiors; like many political cowards, he thought it best to suppress his rage until his time should come to knife his leader at the next convention.

At this juncture Carroll returned to the window.

"There is some one coming up the stairs now, gov'nor," he cried, glad of any interruption to forestall a quarrel.

"Ten to one," broke in Pidgeon, with

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a sleek, cunning expression, very mild under the circumstances, "it's the black-haired, sickly looking chap that talks to himself and says as how he's in Richmond."

The words were a respite from the grave to Pelham, who was suffering from uncertainty as to the poet's fate. They brought back the memory of his great eyes again! The steps on the stairs without became more distinct. He motioned his retainers to the door which led down the back passage, whence they had entered, to Dolly's kitchen below, and bade them wait there for him.

"He lives—he lives—and I have not that on my conscience."

He crossed the room, and opened the door with an eager hand and peered down into the gloom.

In a voice of suppressed emotion he welcomed the incomer: "This way, Mr. Poe; you are a better climber than I."

CHAPTER XXII

Edgar Poe Needs a Friend

To Pelham's astonishment as well as discomfiture, in walked not the poet, but—Helen Whitman!

Her rich gown affected him as it had Erebus. She might have stepped from the canvas of a great painter—glorious hair and classic features—a pathetically beautiful contrast to the meager surroundings of the poet's latest abode. Her face was pale and sad.

"Madam!" exclaimed the sole occupant of the room, bowing respectfully, in spite of his momentary confusion. "I was not looking for you—here."

"No?" she answered with a stately bow, which, if meaning little, at least concealed any surprise that she, too, might have felt at meeting her solicitor at this place. Her social life had taught

her to mask her feelings in a small word, when she so desired, without doing any particular damage to her reputation for truthfulness.

Pelham slowly recovered his *savoir faire*. He was anything but pleased to find this beautiful woman, whom it had been his pleasure as well as business to represent for a number of years, a social visitor to the poet and alone. He felt at once the difference in her interest. It stung his pride, too, for he was rich now, and Poe was poor—he was influential, and Poe was but a scribe.

“Pardon the boudoir,” he could not refrain from saying, with a chilly smile. “The drawing-room is occupied. The parlors are in the hands of the decorators. It is a trifle gloomy, but this is what the artists call a gray day at home.”

Helen was, as before, aghast at the surroundings, but she suppressed her feelings, and replied quite simply to his *innuendo*: “I was told Mr. Poe lived here.”

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"Don't be disappointed," continued the politician suavely. "It's all the way you look at things, madam. Is not this an airy castle? You must expect a poet to dwell among the clouds. Look, yonder are the roofs and steeples." He walked to the window and swept the horizon with his gloved hand with a superb self-consciousness that might have done honor to some famous Beau.

"The great poet reduced to this?" cried Helen at length, her thoughts seeming to wander far away. "It cannot be, Mr. Pelham."

At this moment, Erebus entered quietly, closing the door behind him. Helen heard another voice, and thought it was Tony.

She asked him quickly if Mr. Poe "lived" — then corrected herself — "came here."

Erebus's eyes only followed her in awe.

"Yes, Miss Virginia!" he finally replied mechanically.

The poetess and her solicitor exchanged glances. Pelham, too, had noted the marked resemblance when his client had called at his office, but had purposely made no reference to it.

"You'se Miss Virginiah," continued the negro, "on earth de secon' time, sure as Erebus has eyes; else you'se de spit image ob her."

"De spit image!" Helen smiled sadly as she repeated the negro's quaint expression, reflecting so upon her destiny, and added: "Another witness of my former advent, Mr. Pelham. I begin to think I am Virginia."

It was so, indeed; for she longed so much to take Virginia's place in the poet's heart. A sad expression played upon her spiritual countenance as she contrasted the little garret with so great a mind—an expression which Pelham observed not without pleasure. It was gone in an instant, however, and she politely bade the negro to see if his master were coming.

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Erebus hesitated; for his mind did not work with the quickness of a diplomat's. He knew that his master was asleep or dozing in the next room. He felt, however, from the face of the newcomer, that her sense of propriety would prevent her opening the door where his master rested, and he felt, too, that, even if he left the room, the poet could not be disturbed without his knowing it. He bowed finally, therefore, respectfully, and went his way down the stairs without to the street, to meet and prepare "Mars' Tony."

"I can scarcely wait," sighed the poetess, going to the window and looking out after the negro; "yet how I dread the meeting."

Pelham watched her intently for some moments; then he addressed her hesitatingly:

"I trust you are cured, madam."

"Cured, sir? Of what?" she exclaimed, turning questioningly upon him. Yet, what could be the use of dissimulation now? Laughing sadly, perhaps a

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little apologetically, she answered him: "You know I am a poetess; and a writer of verse, I fear, is seldom cured of anything."

"It is so, indeed?" he mused. "You should not see the poet then—for you are—a woman."

"Your solicitude is unique," she replied gently. "I only fear he will not come."

She took a chair by the table, and moved the candle slowly to the other side, watching intently its flame flicker with the movement.

"I fear so, too," he suggested, going to her. "It will be useless to remain. Let us go at once. You can do no good here. Let us go, madam." He was very earnest.

She replied to him thoughtfully, almost as if she were talking to herself.

"No, I will remain. Edgar Poe needs a friend."

He bit his lip impatiently. He did not dare to speak as he desired.

"I regret you found this place before

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I had time to prepare you," he finally said, with a pretense of sympathy, glancing critically about the room.

She observed his action and his meaning, but she did not deign to answer. He did not then suspect, nor learn until many days later, that Carroll Brent had told her where to come.

"You do not deceive me, madam," he continued, this time abruptly, "even if you do yourself. This is not your whim, your fancy. You come not here for charity—you love this man."

"Love!" The word startled her as she repeated it. A flush of anger played for an instant upon her proud face—to be replaced by a smile. She was too clever, however, to be caught so easily by one she scarcely regarded her equal, even if he were a candidate for Congress. "I love every noble spirit, Mr. Pelham," she observed simply, with a little twinkle in her eye.

Pelham saw that he must take a bolder course.

"Believe me, he is unworthy of you. No social position, no family, the offspring of strolling players."

There was contempt in his voice as he recalled the early history of the poet, which was so well known to him.

Helen rose slowly and raised her eyes to his in sweet reproof. She replied in the gentlest manner, but she felt the triumph in her words.

"Players, yes, who bequeathed him genius, love of art, honesty of purpose, and human sympathy which others would do well to emulate. Show me a mother who has done better by her boy."

The contest was one in which the politician was ill at ease, but he continued to make the best fight he knew.

"Don't be angry, madam," he hastened to say apologetically. "I am outspoken, but honest. For your own sake, let not romance mislead you because, on a moonlight night, a twelvemonth past, it was your mission to stay the hand of Death."

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It was the poetess's turn to look surprised.

"You followed me!" she exclaimed in wonderment.

"Hardly, madam," he replied, with a triumphant smile. "This world is not large enough to hold a woman's secret. My secretary, Carroll Brent, told me."

How strange are the sources of knowledge!

"Oh, why do you bring back the horror of that night?" she cried bitterly. "My nerves tremble still when I think what might have happened in a moment more."

"Heaven's messengers are never late," remarked Pelham dryly, though perhaps it was meant in flattery; but, if flattery, it hit far from the mark.

"Was it not strange that the man of men—" she continued almost in abstraction, as the full horror of it all came back to her—"the man of my affinity—whose poetic moods and thoughts and words had echoed through my brain and heart for

years, should meet me in such a way and I become perhaps his savior?"

"There's the pity of it," cried Pelham, again with a pretense of sympathy, but this time the pretense was so hollow that she shrunk from it and from him. "You rescued him, not saved him."

She looked up as he spoke inquiringly.

"To rule this man is to save him," he went on earnestly. "There is but one way, madam—through his heart; I cannot go that way; you must not."

"You presume, sir——"

He hastened to explain.

"My duty as your adviser makes me speak what I had otherwise rather die than utter of so old a friend. My repeated efforts for his good have been without avail. Fate, it seems, has placed the poet's destiny in your hands. You should know the responsibility and the danger."

"My confidence seems deeper set than yours," she said reproachfully.

"And your acquaintance shorter," he

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replied firmly. "There is a serpent ready to devour you both — called Drink!"

She shuddered as he whispered the word; then became rigid as adamant, and looked her adversary squarely in the eyes; for, from now out, he was her adversary. She replied in low, firm tones filled with conviction:

"That serpent lies dead."

"I hope so," stammered Pelham.

"I know so," she replied with ardor.

"I hold his promise, sir."

Pelham smiled incredulously. The smile angered her.

"I am warned by so-called friends like you," she continued, "till I am heartsick. He has given me pledges. I believe him, sir."

"And I believe—my eyes," he replied, driven to the last stand.

For an instant Helen wavered in her championship. She was not prepared to meet the proofs.

"Your insinuations are unkind," she

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finally controlled herself sufficiently to reply. "I will hear no more."

She started toward the door, bent on departure. He stopped her.

"I am speaking of last night."

The kindness of his tone made her hesitate.

"Last night?" Could it be? Could she be misjudging Mr. Pelham? She stood aghast.

"Our poet has made good use of his short stay here in town," continued her solicitor earnestly, "I assure you, madam."

She still stood doubtful—not knowing how to act or what to say. At another time she would have refused to listen; but now she must know the whole truth if she would help her poet, and her heart sought courage for the ordeal.

Pelham walked to the door and called Erebus, who had been waiting anxiously for Tony on the stairs.

The negro entered, and looked from one to the other inquiringly.

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"Ask his valet," said Pelham quietly, "if you will not believe me."

Helen's only answer was an exclamation of reproof, which Pelham was of too coarse a nature to appreciate.

"His reply, I presume, would not be pleasant?" he inquired sardonically.

"I am not in the habit of questioning the servants of my friends when they are absent," was the answer.

He was still unable to appreciate fully her hesitancy, which came of a refinement above his schooling—from gentle birth, which was not his heritage, for he was not to the manor born.

"Unfortunately," he answered, with a complacent smile, "I cannot be so punctilious where the interests of my client are concerned, madam."

He turned to Erebus with a searching glance, and asked him authoritatively if he had not met his master the night before.

The negro admitted the accusation wonderingly.

"Where did you find him?" was the next demand.

"I found him—" the negro avoided the questioner's eye. "Don' 'membah, sah." He had been cross-examined years before by "Mars' Pelham," and he did not covet it again. He had forgotten the questions; but he still remembered the cane.

"I'll awaken your memory," cried Pelham angrily. "Answer me or I'll have you whipped."

The threat was quickly followed by a warning cry from the poetess.

The rain now pattered on the roof and the clouds rolled thunderously, which added to the depressing gloom of the strange scene being enacted.

"Pardon," said Pelham, bowing to Helen respectfully, but stubbornly continuing his questions. "Was he not at the tavern, with my—I mean with *the* politicians, intoxicated, when you found him?"

"No, sah," replied the negro firmly;

and he was honest, too, in his denial; for, if "Mars' Edgah" was not himself on the night in question, it was because his heart had beat too fast for years in following his flights of fancy, and beat too slow under the sorrows engendered by his life. "Mars' Edgah was not 'toxicated. I neber seen Mars' Edgah 'toxicated. I wouldn't tell a story 'gainst Mars' Edgah if yo' kill me."

Helen's lips trembled with emotion, and a smile expressed the great relief the negro's words had given her. The veins in the politician's forehead swelled almost to bursting with suppressed anger.

"You do not progress well, Mr. Pelham," she suggested, laying her hand kindly on the negro's shoulder. She could not help but feel proud of him; for she knew that a master who could win such love from those who served him could not be otherwise than noble.

Pelham's eyes shifted uncomfortably about the room until they fell upon a small Bible on the table, lying among

the manuscripts and pamphlets. He caught it up quickly, and holding it before the negro, spoke, still with the confidence of success:

“He has not been sworn yet. A nigger is afraid to swear to a lie.”

“It would be well if all white men had the same scruple,” observed the poetess sweetly.

The negro was awed, indeed, at the Holy Scripture.

Helen mistook the anxiety evinced upon his face, and listened anxiously.

“Come here,” Pelham cried angrily, forgetting himself in his determination to find something reflecting upon the poet with which to confront her.

“Put your black hand on the Scripture and swear your master was not drunk!”

A thrill of horror passed through the lady’s heart as she heard that awful word. She could not speak.

Edgar Poe had entered from the little room under the eaves, where he had been

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resting, like one dead in life. He leaned against the door for support, intent upon the scene, until he heard the scandalous insult. He realized at once the motives that engendered it, but not the purpose; for, in his intensity, he had not observed the other visitor. With a proud but feeble step he faced again the one-time secretary.

“The master will answer for himself,” he said, in a suppressed voice that went straightway to Pelham’s false heart. “In this world no tribunal has jurisdiction over the private life of Edgar Poe but his own conscience; in the next, his God!”

There was no rant in his manner; there was quiet and striking dignity.

The accuser bit his lip and turned away. He could not meet Poe’s eyes, that shone like glistening bayonet points.

The poet took the Bible from the negro’s hand.

“‘Judge not that ye be not judged,’ is such a well-worn word of this Book,

sir, that even you should have thumbed it."

He spoke calmly, yet there was power in his manner, which gentleness enhanced.

Helen Whitman could no longer keep her silence; she whispered the poet's name.

He started as though shot, and almost fell.

"You here!" he at length murmured, in a tone of anguish, supporting himself with difficulty. She moved toward him, but he stopped her with a motion of his hand.

Pelham had time to recover his poise, and with it his malice, for now that he saw again his rival alive he had no fear nor mercy in his heart.

"My old friend, Edgar Poe, of Richmond!" he said, in a suavely insulting tone, as if he were surprised to meet the poet there. "Oh, joy, joy! They told me your eye was bleared, your step infirm, your cheek sunken, your once buoy-

ant carriage gone forever. 'Tis false, 'tis false, thank God! I have the ocular proof—'tis false! From this moment, sir, believe me, your companion to confront Rumor with her own lies. My duty to my party calls me. The storm is gathering. Marjary will be anxious about you, madam; I am ready to show you to your carriage."

Poe made no sign in response to the words. He only leaned a little more heavily against the table and seemed to grow paler, if that were possible.

"Thank you," replied Helen courteously, for she could not speak otherwise; "I will not trouble you further to-day, Mr. Pelham."

"I do not understand—" he began quickly.

"I have business with Mr. Poe."

"You surely do not intend—" he stammered in surprise. "Pardon me, but—what will Scandal say if I leave you here unprotected and alone?"

"Scandal!" cried the poetess, with a

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little laugh of triumph. "You see this little hoop of gold? It is the betrothal ring of honest souls, placed upon my finger with holiest affiance vows—by Edgar Poe."

The poet made no other sign than to raise his eyes heavenward, as if asking for forgiveness.

"Pardon, a thousand pardons, madam," stammered the solicitor. "I did not think it had gone so far. My congratulations; may much happiness attend your coming union."

There was insult in his every word.

"Erebus," said the poet to his attendant quietly, "see this gentleman safely out. We regret he must depart so soon."

"Thank you," replied the visitor, with mock courtesy, "I can find the way alone. Good evening, friends."

He passed out of the door and down the stairs.

Erebus followed him.

CHAPTER XXIII

Nevermore!

THERE was a moment's silence. The rain beat against the windows. The lightning played fantastically in the sky.

"How I pity such a man," said Poe, almost kindly; "to fall below contempt is to fall very low indeed."

"Edgar, dear, do not mind his insults," pleaded Helen, as she hurried to his side tenderly and with the great sympathy of a great woman's heart. She suffered as deeply as the poet.

"It is not that," replied Poe, as in a reverie, for he avoided still her eyes; "it is not that which gnaws my heart."

He seemed to realize for the first time that he had a fair visitor to his little garret, and that something was due from him as host.

"Pardon my discourtesy," he hastened

to say. "I have grown so thoughtless of late. Did my servant not offer you a chair? Erebus, what do you mean? Bring the lady— Erebus!" Erebus did not respond. "Permit *me*, madam."

Poe felt the need of courtesy, and himself brought a broken chair with all the gallantry of his old-time self. He placed it near her and motioned her to a seat with the beautiful manner of Southern hospitality.

Helen leaned against the chair but did not take it. She was not prepared for what she saw—still less for all that she had seen.

"Erebus! Erebus!" called the poet petulantly; but the negro's sensibility still kept him from intruding. "I say, bring the lady some refreshments. She has traveled far. Some wine and cakes, Erebus. We honor ourselves in honoring our fair guest. Erebus, some wine!" He went to the table and took up a broken dipper. Gradually the realization of his misfortunes came over him.

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"I forgot," he murmured pathetically. "Times have changed for me. I am no longer the prodigal son at home."

He filled a glass with water from the oaken bucket, and with all the pride and the grandeur of a Castilian host approached the lady, who was so very sad and whose eyes were so very full of tears and love and beauty.

"Here is one drink left," he said softly, but with the bearing of a prince bestowing a blushing goblet on his bride, "the most priceless of them all. Even the tattered vagabond, by lifting a refreshing draught from the wayside stream, in this can play mine host most royally. It comes from the hillside. It is as pure as Mother Earth. Honor me, madam, in God's own beverage."

She took the glass, with seeming gratefulness, lest she might hurt him, and placed it on the table, as though she were not disposed quite yet to drink.

"No, no, Edgar," she cried. "Oh, what has happened to you, dearest?"

Your eyes are so sad and distant. What is it, love? If I am not to be your confidant, then I should not be your wife."

She took his hand and looked fondly into his eyes. He made no answer.

"'Tis my happiness to divide your cares," she still pleaded with womanly tenderness. "You tremble but do not answer, Edgar. Your silence chills my very heart. Has your love grown cold, and does some other passion now fill your breast?"

He shuddered and looked about him with a delirious glance.

"Yes, yes, that is it," he whispered in the choked voice of suffering. "A passion that will devour us both. You have heard but now the words of your friend—my friend; for God's sake, heed his warning, heed his warning."

He broke from her and tottered to the chair which he had brought for her, and sat upon it, hiding his face in his hands. He shook convulsively. She bent over him tenderly; then kneeled beside him.

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"You are trifling, Edgar," she said passionately. "Why did you leave me so? You filled me with every hope. You told me, in words such as poets only can speak, how you loved me, and, when I breathed accordant answer to your vows, you were gone; and I had naught but idle words to fill the place of love."

She still pleaded with him, but he listened for some moments to the storm without before he spoke in answer. His eyes were fixed, distracted.

"It was a July midnight . . .

Clad all in white upon a violet bank

I saw thee

And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing
trees

Didst glide away. *Only thine eyes remained.*

They *would not* go—they never yet have
gone."

She scarcely breathed as he vaguely pronounced these words inscribed "To Helen."

The Raven

"All this," she cried in anguish, "and still you fled from me, Edgar!"

"My promise," he answered, unable still to look at her. "I could not look into your face, it was so like hers. I could not deceive you about myself; and so I fled, fled, fled!"

He rose with a startled movement and went to the table across the room. She followed him, for a terrible look had come into his face. She feared for its meaning.

The rain pattered on the roof a melancholy, dreadful reveille like the rattle of many drums.

"The ways of Heaven are manifold," she pleaded, her arm upon his shoulder; "God made me in her image for a purpose, Edgar; I believe that purpose was to save you from yourself."

"Save me!" he cried in grim humor, his eyes far away. "For what?—more hours of wretched poverty? I mean—I—I am unworthy of your interest, Helen. I fled from you to save you, not myself.

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I am past redemption. Oh, why did you follow me here? ”

The lightning flashed at the window, and there was a low angry growl from the distant heavens. He took her hands in his, and for the first time looked deeply into her eyes.

“ Because I love you, Edgar,” she replied fervently; “ and Love alone can save you, Edgar, as the lesser passion is lost and smothered in the greater. Trust in Love, dear; it has saved the world.”

He shook his head sadly.

“ I brought wretchedness to one soul who trusted me,” he exclaimed wildly. “ I cannot to another and live. Look about you. Is this the home to ask a wife to share—a poet’s garret? Is there no escape from it all? no refuge from self? ”

He rushed to the gable window in desperation. In his fancy, the little garret window had suddenly become the great Tarpian Rock, whence he could dash his soul to its destruction, and perhaps forget

The Raven

his misery. She screamed and followed him—anticipating his thought. She would have been too late, however, had not a flash of lightning filled the window, and for the moment blinded him. She threw her arms about him and clung to him madly.

“Edgar,” she cried, “for love of Heaven, what would you do?”

He stood in mad uncertainty. A wild, fixed stare came into his eyes.

Flames leaped from a neighboring building, where the lightning had struck. The engines dashed by, and the ringing of the bells affrighted the people’s hearts and startled the night.

Poe answered them with a delirious cry:

“Hear the loud alarum bells—

Brazen bells!

What a tale of terror now their turbulency
tells!

In the startled ear of night

How they scream out their affright!

The Love Story of Edgar Allan Poe

Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of
the fire."

A moment, and the bells in the distant
steeple rang out a merry chime. Poe
listened, wavering.

"Hush," he whispered, "the bells,
bells, bells, bells! They laugh at the
storm without and the storm within.
Would I were made like them. I would
laugh as well."

Helen cried out, with a hopeful heart,
at the joyous peal.

"Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!

What a world of happiness their harmony
foretells!

"An omen, Edgar, an omen! They ring
out hope for you and hope for me. An
omen, love!"

The Raven

She kissed his hand fervently.

Bells in another steeple rang out in answer; but the chimes were not the same. Now they tolled ghoulishly; and the melancholy that oppressed them was enhanced as the notes were borne on the wings of the storm to the little garret, where life and death and love hung in the balance.

The thunder rolled ominously in the distance.

Poe laughed back at the bells mockingly:

“Hear the tolling of the bells—

Iron bells;

What a world of solemn thought their
melody compels!

“An omen, yes! the wedding march and then the funeral dirge. A merry omen, truly. I would reverse the order to perfect the joy. The tolling first. Aye, my thoughtless valet was right. He arrayed the bridegroom in his funeral

The Love Story of Edgar Allan Poe

clothes, forgetting it was his wedding day."

There was another distant peal of thunder, echoing the earthly bells. The poet shuddered and crouched near the table, on which the candle flickered low in its socket. It was horror, not fear, that wrought upon him now.

"Hark, you hear the roar of the maelstrom! Flee, flee from me, Helen, as you would from Death. It comes, it comes, it comes—for me!"

He seemed like a man distraught. She bent over him anxiously to divert him; but it was hopeless.

"Don't you hear the ominous flapping of its wings?" he cried.

"'Tis the storm distracts you, Edgar," she answered. "There is no soul here but you and I."

"It has no soul. It is a demon," cried the poet, in a frenzy of despair; "the demon of my blighted life. Its curse is written—" His voice was lost in the storm.

The Raven

The poetess turned her head away hopelessly and covered her eyes in prayer, but she did not move from the poet's side.

The lightning played on the walls through the windows. It came and went, and then it came again.

The poet seemed to see in his wild imaginations, as the light danced on the cobwebbed rafters, a raven sitting on a bust of Pallas and fading away with the flashes. Lenore came not; only the Raven, Raven, Raven!

It was an awful moment, for death was in the storm.

He called upon Helen to witness where the Raven perched upon the bust of Pallas—its basilisk eyes piercing into his very soul; but she could see nothing, for there was nothing.

She tried in vain to comfort him, but he would not listen. He did not seem to hear her. A spiritual look came into his face. The lightning played again upon the wall.

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“ ‘Prophet!’ said I, ‘thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.’ ”

There was a crash of thunder. He would have fallen, but Helen supported him in her arms.

“Nevermore! Nevermore! Nevermore!” he murmured, looking strangely from the light on the wall into Helen’s eyes.

Then he shook his head slowly.

“Oh, I am a thing, a nameless thing o’er which the Raven flaps his funeral wing! Lord help my poor soul.”

He sank upon the floor of the garret, which was his last home.

“Edgar! Edgar!” she cried in agony.

The Raven

She sank over him in despair.

"I understand it now. It is the memory he loved, not me."

Tony and the doctor came too late.

(1)

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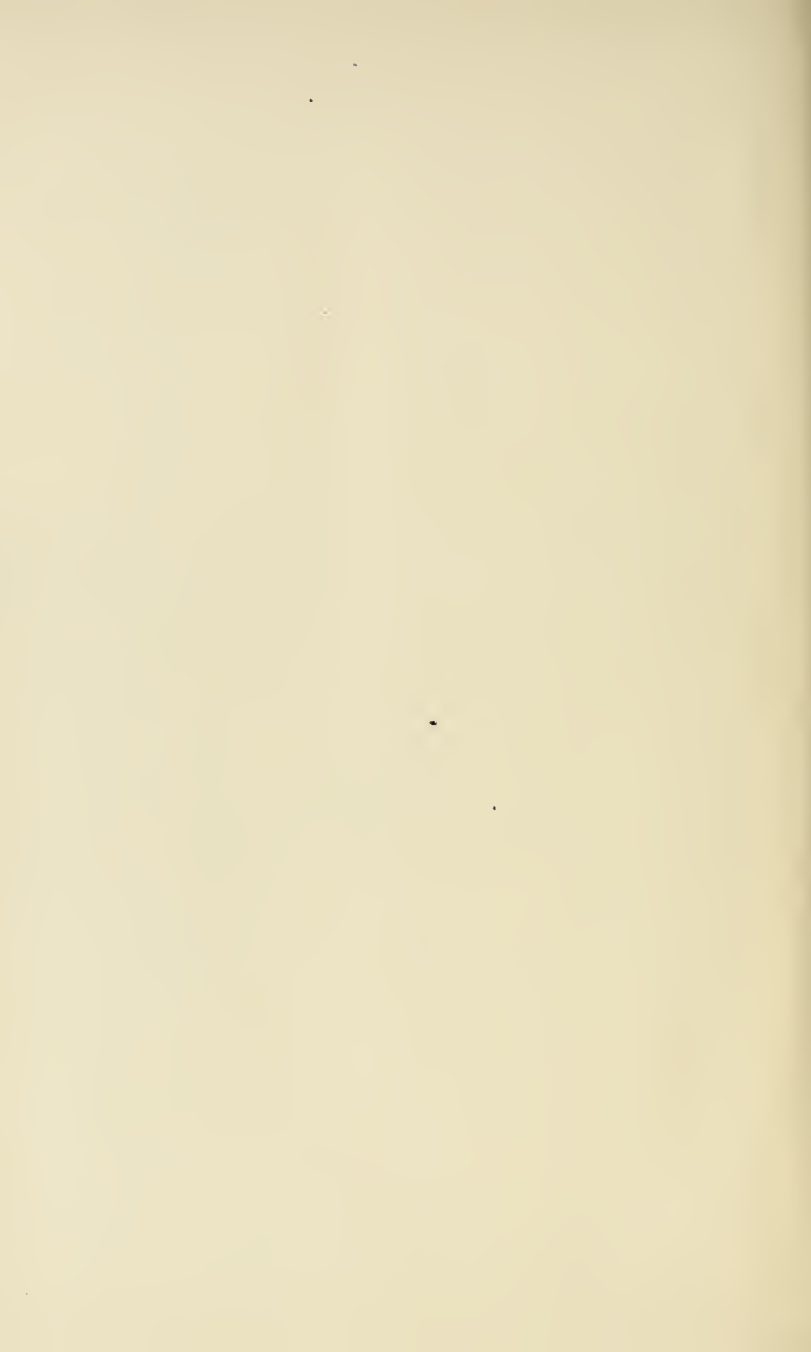
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